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The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care can be contacted through its website at <http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/> or by email mail@safetyandquality.gov.au

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Minimum data set for safety and quality

Q. To what does the term 'minimum data set' refer?

- A.** The Council is committed to improving data and information for safer health care throughout Australia. A National Minimum Data Set refers to the collection of a minimum and consistent amount of data from health care organisations across the country so that it can be analysed to identify the potential for errors and areas for improvement.

Q. Why do we need a minimum data set?

- A.** Better use of data and information at all levels of the health care system is needed to develop a common understanding of the size and scope of safety problems in Australian health care. It is critical that data collection and analysis is improved in order to learn about weaknesses in the health care system, and areas for improvement.

National reporting of data will help health care organisations to identify where safety and quality problems exist, to identify trends, and to develop practical approaches to addressing these problems.

Q. What information is currently reported at a national level within the health care sector?

- A.** National safety and quality data is not currently reported, but the Council is working toward this using a number of initiatives. For example, the Council has facilitated the development of an Agreed National Core Set of Sentinel Events, with one state publicly reporting this information. A process for developing a National Sentinel Event Report is well under way, with the first national report to be produced in 2005.

There is currently no national agreement about the type of data that should be collected to give a measure of the safety and quality of Australian health care. The development of a National Minimum Data Set will assist in working toward this goal.

Q. What information will a national minimum data set provide?

- A.** It will provide consistent information about safety and quality within individual organisations, as well as at a state and national level. This will allow comparison at each of these levels and help to identify where problems exist, where improvements are needed, and allow the monitoring of improvements following the introduction of quality improvement initiatives.

The development of a National Minimum Data Set for Safety and Quality will also assist in providing a measure of the safety and quality of health care in Australia and, over time, allow the measurement of progress in addressing known problem areas, as well as the success of initiatives introduced to address these problems.

In addition, the use of a National Minimum Data Set will help to identify where gaps in safety and quality data exist.

Q. How can I find out more information?

- A.** More information on the national minimum data set and the work of the Council can be obtained by visiting the Council's website at www.safetyandquality.org, or by contacting the Office of the Safety and Quality Council:

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