

Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Ms. Sebelius:

As an assembly of patient safety advocates who attended by invitation the Institute for Healthcare Improvement Leadership Summit for Patient Activists (December 2010)'s and/or participate with the Consumers Union Safe Patient Project, we understand the importance of best practices to improve care for our nation's most vulnerable. Our work individually and collaboratively is bringing awareness and implementation of best practices for safe care. This week many of us pledged the Partnership for Patients: Better Care, Lower Costs Initiative. Implementing newborn screening for Critical Congenital Heart Disease (CCHD) using pulse ox fits the description of low cost, better care for newborns.

Pulse oximetry has been proven to save lives and improve outcomes by bolstering newborn detection rates - by as much as 10-fold. Because of its non-invasive nature, this simple diagnostic tool is already known as "the 5th vital sign" among the health care community.

The Secretary's Advisory Committee on Heritable Disorders in Newborns and Children recently recommended screening of newborns for Critical Congenital Heart Disease (CCHD). Pulse oximetry equipment is already available in every US hospital and birthing center – and the cost is equivalent to that of a diaper change. It is also a part of the new Neonatal Resuscitation Protocol (NRP) which has many hospitals installing pulse oximetry units on all infant warmers.

In an unprecedented show of collaboration, the CDC, NIH, HRSA, AAP, March of Dimes, and AHA, along with provider groups and family advocates have all weighed in with their support. Patient safety advocates and organizations also recognize the importance of pulse ox screening implementation to improve safety and improve communication between parents and their children's healthcare providers. We are uniting to show our support and collaboration for the reduction of the US infant mortality rate by implementing pulse ox screening for CCHDs.

Most sincerely,

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