

p4ps Advisors

Susan E. Sheridan, MIM, MBA

Susan Sheridan is a consumer organizer and spokesperson on health and safety issues. Both her husband, Pat, and their son, Cal, experienced serious injuries as the result of medical system failures. Cal, who is now seven years old, has kernicterus -- a brain injury characterized by cerebral palsy and other associated neurological deficits -- caused by the failure to treat his neonatal jaundice. Pat died in 2002, from cancer that grew into his spinal cord after the healthcare system where his original tumor was removed failed to communicate the diagnosis of cancer to him, his family or his subsequent treating physicians. In addition to experiencing its failures, as frequent users Pat, Cal and Sue have seen the healthcare system and the people who work within it deliver excellent care.

Sue first spoke publicly on patient safety issues when she was invited to testify at the first National Summit on Medical Errors and Patient Safety sponsored by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) in September of 2000. Her testimony called for universal bilirubin testing of newborns and revised treatment guidelines and policies and procedures governing jaundice management. She also advocated a collaborative approach between consumers and professional groups, accreditation organizations and regulatory agencies involved in establishing standards of care for the detection and the treatment of hyperbilirubinemia.

Following her testimony, the Sheridan family was featured in *USA Today*. The article helped several families of children with kernicterus network and unite, resulting in the establishment of Parents of Infants and Children with Kernicterus (PICK) by six "moms" in October 2000. Since that time, PICK has worked collaboratively with all stakeholders interested in neonatal safety, notably the Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO), which issued a *Sentinel Event Alert* on Kernicterus (April 2001) -- the first ever initiated by a consumer communication to the JCAHO; the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), which issued a *Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report* (June 2001) on the reemergence of kernicterus and designated it as an emerging priority (September 2002) in neonatal preventive health; and with the National Quality Forum, which included kernicterus in the list of serious, preventable "never events" that no patient should ever experience (January 2002). PICK remains active with these and other agencies to increase awareness of the risks of kernicterus and the importance of effective bilirubin screening for newborns.

Currently serving as President of PICK and on the Advisory Board of Partnership for Patient Safety, Sue speaks frequently to audiences interested in patient safety, with special emphasis on the role of consumers as partners in achieving a more patient-centered, systems-based approach to healthcare. She has a BA in Economics and Spanish from Albion College and dual Masters degrees in International Management and Business Administration from the American Graduate School of International Management (Thunderbird) in Phoenix, AZ. Susan and Pat were Peace Corps volunteers in Ecuador from 1987-1989. Prior to 1992, Susan was Manager and Vice President of the International Trade Finance Department at First City Texas bank in Dallas. Susan also is the founder of Jumpstart, a comprehensive immersion program for children with disabilities in Boise, Idaho, where she resides with Cal and his younger sister, Mackenzie.

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