

# Executive Summary

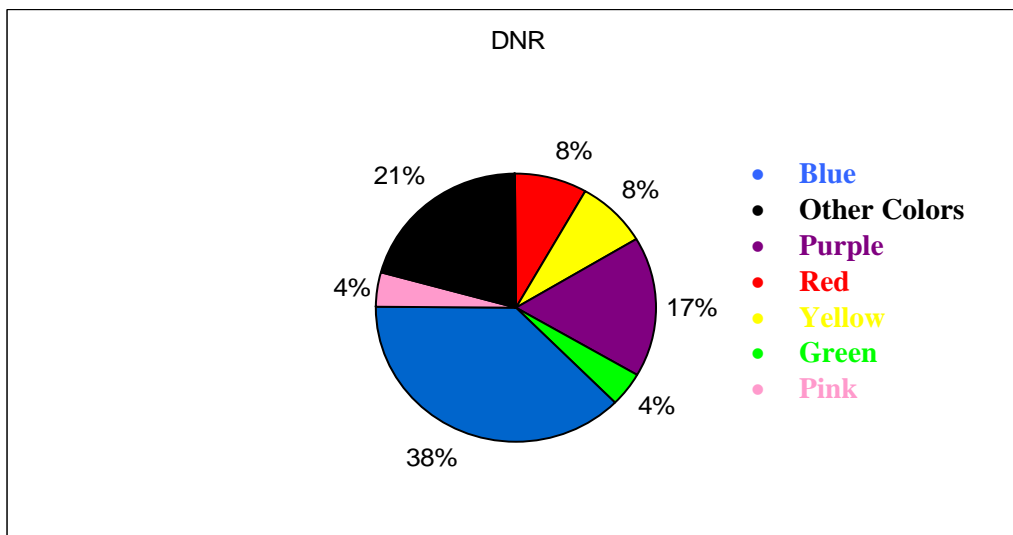
Improving patient safety, including reducing risks of injury or harm, has been a strategic focus of Tennessee Hospital Association (THA) through its Tennessee Center for Patient Safety.

THA is asking hospitals to improve communication consistency and reduce the risk of patient harm by standardizing color-coded patient alert wristbands.

In December 2005, the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Reporting System issued a *Patient Safety Advisory* that received national attention. This advisory highlighted an incident that occurred in a hospital in which clinicians nearly failed to rescue a patient experiencing a cardiopulmonary arrest because the patient had been incorrectly designated as do-not-resuscitate (DNR).

The source of confusion was a nurse who mistakenly placed a yellow wristband on the patient. In that hospital, a yellow wristband meant DNR. In a nearby hospital where the nurse also worked, yellow meant “restricted extremity” (meaning this arm is not to be used for drawing blood or obtaining intravenous (IV) access), which was her intended alert. Fortunately, another nurse recognized the mistake, and the patient was resuscitated.

This type of “near miss” could occur in Tennessee facilities. Based on a survey sent to THA member hospitals in December 2008, Tennessee hospitals use a variety of colors to indicate allergy, fall risk and DNR. Based on survey results, five different colors were being used to indicate allergy, seven different colors to indicate fall risk and seven colors to identify patients with DNR orders.



As of summer 2009, nearly 30 states have standardized color-coded patient alert wristbands. Consistent with these states, THA is implementing a color-coded patient alert wristband standardization initiative focused on the three most commonly used patient alert wristband colors: red to indicate allergy, yellow to indicate fall risk and purple to indicate DNR. **The purpose of the initiative is to consistently and effectively communicate an alert to a healthcare provider if the patient has an allergy, is a fall risk and/or carries a DNR order.** With a standardized method of communicating these risks, the potential for confusion when patients, physicians and nurses travel between different hospitals is greatly reduced.

THA's goal is to gain a 100 percent participation rate from Tennessee hospitals by December 31, 2009, ensuring the consistency of these three alerts. In addition, THA is collaborating with surrounding state hospital associations to ensure communication consistency and awareness among the states that border Tennessee.

**While THA encourages standardization of these three patient alert wristband colors to ensure clear and consistent messaging throughout its membership, it is important to note this initiative does not require those hospitals that presently do not use color-coded patient alert wristbands to adopt the practice.**

## **Use Agreement and Acknowledgements**

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