PATIENT SAFETY CULTURE IN SAUDI MILITARY HEALTHCARE: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF CONTRIBUTIONS FROM NURSING, EPIDEMIOLOGY, RADIOLOGY, PARAMEDICS, OPERATING ROOM TEAMS, AND PHARMACY TECHNICIANS

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Abstract

Background: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) has prioritized patient safety as a cornerstone of its "Vision 2030" healthcare transformation. Within the military healthcare sector—noted for its high-volume, high-stakes environments—maintaining a robust Patient Safety Culture (PSC) is critical. While many studies focus broadly on physicians and bedside nurses, the specific contributions and perceptions of the multidisciplinary team—including radiology, pharmacy, and emergency medical services—are vital for a holistic understanding of systemic safety. **Objective:** This systematic review aims to synthesize current evidence regarding the perceptions, barriers, and facilitators of patient safety culture among diverse healthcare professionals (Nursing, Epidemiology, Radiology, Paramedics, Operating Room teams, and Pharmacy Technicians) within Saudi military hospitals. **Methods:** A systematic search was conducted across major databases (PubMed, CINAHL, Google Scholar, and Saudi Digital Library) for studies published between 2014 and 2024. Inclusion criteria focused on empirical studies utilizing validated tools, such as the Hospital Survey on Patient Safety Culture (HSOPSC), specifically within the Saudi military medical context. **Results:** Preliminary findings indicate a moderate perception of patient safety culture across the Saudi military sector, characterized by strong teamwork and managerial support but hindered by a persistent "blame culture," staffing shortages leading to burnout, and critical communication gaps during specialty-specific transitions in pharmacy, radiology, and

operative care. **Conclusion:** While Saudi military healthcare facilities demonstrate a strong foundational commitment to safety, improving the non-punitive reporting environment and addressing staffing shortages are essential for moving from "compliance" to a "culture of safety." Future interventions should be tailored to the unique workflows of paramedical and technical staff, rather than relying on nursing-centric models alone.

Keywords: *Patient Safety Culture, Saudi Arabia, Military Healthcare, Multidisciplinary Teams, HSOPSC, Nursing, Pharmacy Technicians.*

I. Introduction

The global pursuit of excellence in Patient Safety Culture (PSC) has transitioned from a professional aspiration to a rigorous institutional mandate. Within high-reliability organizations, such as military medical complexes, the ability to deliver care that is consistently safe, timely, and effective is a core metric of operational readiness. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), this mandate is deeply embedded in the Health Sector Transformation Program, a centerpiece of Saudi Vision 2030. This national roadmap seeks to restructure the healthcare ecosystem into a more integrated, value-based, and digitally advanced system, where patient safety serves as the primary benchmark for quality (Ministry of Health, 2023).

The Saudi military healthcare sector—overseen by the Medical Services Administration of the Armed Forces—represents one of the most sophisticated and high-volume healthcare networks in the Middle East. Operating under unique organizational pressures, including a rigid hierarchical structure and a diverse patient population ranging from active-duty personnel to their dependents, these facilities face distinct challenges in maintaining a "just culture." Patient Safety Culture is defined as the shared values, beliefs, and behavioral norms among healthcare providers that determine the priority given to patient safety over other operational goals (Al-Otaibi et al., 2022). While foundational research into PSC in Saudi Arabia has historically concentrated on the nursing workforce within Ministry of Health (MOH) hospitals, there is a growing realization that safety is a multidisciplinary output that cannot be understood through the lens of a single profession.

The clinical trajectory of a patient within a military hospital is an intricate chain of interdependencies. It begins with the rapid triage and stabilization provided by Paramedics in pre-hospital or emergency settings, moves through the diagnostic precision of Radiologists, and involves the technical vigilance of Pharmacy Technicians in ensuring medication accuracy. For surgical patients, safety is dictated by the seamless coordination of Operating Room (OR) teams, while Epidemiologists provide the necessary surveillance to prevent healthcare-associated infections. Despite the inherent discipline of military medicine, systemic vulnerabilities often surface at the "handoff" points between these departments (Al-Saeed & Ahmed, 2021).

Recent empirical evidence suggests that while Saudi military hospitals often score high in "Teamwork Within Units," they frequently struggle with a "Non-punitive Response to Error." This "blame culture" remains a significant barrier, as staff may fear disciplinary action or professional stigma, leading to the underreporting of near-misses and adverse events (Al-Harbi et al., 2023). Furthermore, the rapid expansion of specialized services has placed immense pressure on staffing

Acta Biomed 2025; Vol. 96, N. 1: ISSN: 0392-4203 | eISSN: 2531-6745

levels. Allied health professionals, particularly those in high-acuity areas like the OR or Emergency Department, report high levels of burnout, which has been statistically linked to a decline in clinical accuracy and an increase in avoidable errors (Al-Hazmi, 2024).

This systematic review addresses a critical gap in the contemporary literature by synthesizing the specific contributions and safety perceptions of Nursing, Epidemiology, Radiology, Paramedics, Operating Room Teams, and Pharmacy Technicians. By moving beyond the traditional physician-nurse dyad, this study aims to provide a 360-degree view of the safety ecosystem in Saudi military healthcare. Understanding how these diverse roles interact with safety protocols is essential for policymakers within the Ministry of Defense to move from a culture of "compliance" to a resilient, proactive culture of "safety excellence."

Rationale

The impetus for this systematic review stems from a critical convergence of national healthcare goals and the unique operational demands of military medicine. While the Saudi Vision 2030 has catalyzed a rapid shift toward high-standard, patient-centered care, the military healthcare sector operates under a distinct organizational subculture—one defined by rigid hierarchies, high-acuity environments, and a diverse workforce.

The rationale for focusing on Nursing, Epidemiology, Radiology, Paramedics, Operating Room (OR) Teams, and Pharmacy Technicians is based on the following factors:

1. **The Multidisciplinary Safety Chain:** Traditional safety research often creates a "siloed" view by focusing primarily on physicians and nurses. However, a patient's safety is a longitudinal experience. For instance, a paramedic's field triage, a radiologist's interpretation of a trauma scan, and a pharmacy technician's medication preparation are all high-risk touchpoints where errors can propagate.
2. **The "High-Reliability" Paradox:** Military hospitals are designed to be high-reliability organizations (HROs). Yet, the very traits that make them efficient—strict adherence to chain of command—can sometimes create a "blame culture" that discourages lower-level technical staff (like pharmacy technicians or paramedics) from reporting near-misses.
3. **Workforce Diversification:** The Saudi military medical workforce is increasingly composed of specialized allied health professionals. Understanding the specific stressors (e.g., radiation safety in radiology or sterile field maintenance in the OR) is essential for developing targeted interventions that a generic, hospital-wide safety policy might miss.
4. **Addressing the "Blame Culture" Gap:** Preliminary data suggests that while "Teamwork within Units" is a strength in KSA, the "Non-punitive Response to Error" remains a significant weakness. By investigating multiple specialties, we can determine if this fear of retribution is uniform or if certain departments (like Epidemiology or the OR) have developed more resilient reporting cultures.

Hypothesis

Based on the current landscape of healthcare in the Kingdom and the inherent structures of military medical services, this review tests the following hypotheses:

- **H1 (Primary):** There is a statistically significant variation in the perception of **Patient Safety Culture (PSC)** across different professional groups, with nursing and OR teams perceiving a stronger safety climate than paramedics and pharmacy technicians due to differing levels of integration into hospital-wide safety committees.
- **H2 (Reporting Barriers):** A **"Non-punitive Response to Error"** will be identified as the lowest-scoring dimension across all specialties, but it will be most pronounced among technical and paramedical staff who operate under strict hierarchical supervision.
- **H3 (Operational Impact):** Staffing shortages and high patient volume (burnout factors) will show a direct negative correlation with "Frequency of Events Reported" across all six identified disciplines.
- **H4 (Vision 2030 Influence):** Military hospitals that have undergone recent accreditation (e.g., CBAHI or JCI) will show significantly higher scores in "Management Support for Patient Safety" compared to those in the early stages of transformation.

II. Literature Review

The following literature review provides an exhaustive examination of the theoretical foundations, organizational dynamics, and discipline-specific empirical data regarding Patient Safety Culture (PSC) within the Saudi military healthcare landscape. This review synthesizes how traditional military hierarchy intersects with modern clinical safety mandates under the umbrella of Saudi Vision 2030.

1. The High-Reliability Paradigm and the Military Context

The conceptual framework for patient safety in Saudi military hospitals is increasingly modeled after High-Reliability Organizations (HROs)—systems like nuclear power and aviation that maintain safety despite high complexity and inherent risk. Weick and Sutcliffe (2015) argue that HROs are characterized by a "preoccupation with failure," a "reluctance to simplify," and "sensitivity to operations."

In the Saudi context, military medical cities (such as Prince Sultan Military Medical City) are navigating a transition from a historically rigid command-and-control hierarchy to a more flexible, safety-oriented culture. While military discipline ensures high adherence to standardized protocols, it can simultaneously act as a double-edged sword; subordinates—particularly technical staff and junior nurses—may feel hesitant to challenge the status quo or report errors made by senior officers or physicians (Al-Harbi et al., 2023). This "Power Distance" is a known inhibitor of the "Speak Up" culture essential for error interception.

2. Nursing: The Backbone of Safety and the Burden of Burnout

Nursing remains the primary focus of PSC research in the Kingdom. Longitudinal studies utilizing the Hospital Survey on Patient Safety Culture (HSOPSC) have consistently identified "Teamwork within Units" as the highest-scoring dimension among Saudi military nurses, reflecting a strong sense of camaraderie and mutual support in high-pressure wards (Al-Otaibi et al., 2022).

However, these strengths are often undermined by systemic "latent conditions." Nurses frequently report that staffing levels are insufficient to meet the demands of high-acuity wards,

Acta Biomed 2025; Vol. 96, N. 1: ISSN: 0392-4203 | eISSN: 2531-6745

leading to cognitive overload. When staffing is suboptimal, nurses often engage in "work-arounds" to maintain efficiency, which inadvertently bypasses safety barriers. Furthermore, the transition of care—or handoffs—remains a persistent vulnerability. In military medical cities with high patient turnover, the loss of critical information during shift changes is a documented precursor to medication and procedural errors (Saied & Al-Ahmadi, 2022).

3. Radiology: Moving Beyond Technical Safety

In many Saudi military facilities, the safety culture within Radiology has traditionally been "siloed" around technical radiation physics and the ALARA (As Low As Reasonably Achievable) principle. However, contemporary literature suggests that the broader safety culture—encompassing communication and error reporting—is equally vital to prevent diagnostic errors.

Radiologists and radiographers in the Saudi military sector often report a disconnect from the hospital's central safety leadership. A systematic review of allied health perceptions found that radiology staff are less likely to perceive a "Non-punitive Response to Error" than their nursing counterparts. They often fear that a technical error in imaging or interpretation will lead to formal disciplinary action or "blacklisting" in their professional file rather than a systemic review of the workflow (Al-Saeed & Ahmed, 2021).

4. Paramedics and Pre-Hospital Safety Dynamics

The Saudi military paramedic workforce faces a unique set of safety challenges that are largely neglected in general hospital safety literature. Operating in the pre-hospital environment, these professionals must maintain safety standards during rapid transport, tactical extractions, and emergency stabilization.

Research indicates that the "Safety Climate" for Saudi paramedics is heavily influenced by the quality of communication with the Emergency Department (ED). "Information silos" between the field and the hospital represent the greatest risk to patient safety. Furthermore, as the Saudi military expands its specialized paramedic training, there is a growing need to address **burnout**. Paramedics in the military sector report high levels of "alert fatigue" and emotional exhaustion, which has been statistically correlated with an increase in medication administration errors in the field (Al-Hazmi, 2024).

5. Operating Room (OR) Teams and Hierarchy

The Operating Room is arguably the most complex micro-system within military healthcare, where surgeons, nurses, and technicians must function as a single unit. Safety in the OR is predicated on the Surgical Safety Checklist, yet its effectiveness is entirely dependent on the underlying culture.

Recent studies have shown that OR teams in Saudi military hospitals show high scores in "Organizational Learning," but "Communication Openness" remains a mid-tier score. Qualitative evidence suggests that implementing TeamSTEPPS (Team Strategies and Tools to Enhance Performance and Patient Safety) has been effective in breaking down hierarchical barriers. However, the military's rank-based structure still occasionally interferes with "flat hierarchy" principles required during surgical crises, where any team member should be able to halt a procedure if a safety breach is detected (Al-Malki et al., 2023).

6. Pharmacy Technicians: The Final Gatekeepers

Pharmacy technicians in Saudi military hospitals manage an immense volume of prescriptions for both active-duty personnel and the civilian population. While technology like Automated Dispensing Cabinets (ADCs) reduces manual "slip" errors, it introduces new systemic risks related to software overrides and inventory lag.

Literature focusing on Saudi pharmacy technicians highlights the "Medication Reconciliation" process as a primary area of concern. Technicians often feel they are the "last line of defense" but lack the institutional "clout" to halt a dispensing process if they suspect a systemic prescription error. Al-Ghamdi et al. (2023) noted that pharmacy technicians in the military sector are particularly sensitive to the "blame culture," as their errors are easily quantified and traced back to individuals through electronic logs, unlike more subjective diagnostic errors in other departments.

7. Epidemiology and Systemic Surveillance

Epidemiologists serve as the "data-driven conscience" of patient safety. In the Saudi military sector, their role has shifted from mere infection control to becoming architects of safety culture. By tracking Healthcare-Associated Infections (HAIs) and implementing evidence-based "bundles," they provide the objective metrics that management uses to gauge safety performance.

Literature indicates that when epidemiology teams are highly visible and collaborative—rather than just "inspectors"—the overall PSC scores for "Management Support for Patient Safety" increase significantly (Ministry of Health, 2023). Their role is pivotal in moving the organization toward a "Generative" safety culture where safety is a core value, not just a set of rules.

III. Methods

This systematic review was conducted in strict accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure transparency, replicability, and academic rigor. The methodology was designed to capture a multidisciplinary perspective of Patient Safety Culture (PSC) within the specific context of Saudi military healthcare.

1. Search Strategy and Data Sources

A comprehensive electronic search was performed across six primary databases to identify relevant literature published between January 2015 and January 2026:

- PubMed/MEDLINE
- CINAHL (Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature)
- Embase
- PsycINFO
- Google Scholar (for grey literature and regional Saudi journals)
- Saudi Digital Library (SDL)

The search strategy utilized a combination of Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) and free-text keywords using Boolean operators (AND/OR). The primary search string was:

("Patient Safety Culture" OR "Safety Climate" OR "HSOPSC") AND ("Saudi Arabia" OR "KSA") AND ("Military Hospital" OR "Armed Forces Medical Services" OR "Medical City") AND

Acta Biomed 2025; Vol. 96, N. 1: ISSN: 0392-4203 | eISSN: 2531-6745

("Nursing" OR "Radiology" OR "Pharmacy" OR "Paramedic" OR "Operating Room" OR "Epidemiology").

2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To maintain the focus of the review, the following criteria were applied:

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Study Design	Quantitative (cross-sectional), Qualitative, and Mixed-methods studies.	Editorials, commentaries, and case reports.
Setting	Military hospitals and clinics within Saudi Arabia.	Non-military public (MOH) or private sector hospitals.
Participants	Nurses, Epidemiologists, Radiologists, Paramedics, OR Teams, and Pharmacy Technicians.	Studies focusing exclusively on medical students or administrative staff.
Outcomes	Measurement of safety culture dimensions (e.g., HSOPSC, SAQ).	Studies only measuring clinical outcomes without a culture component.
Language	English and Arabic.	All other languages.

3. Study Selection and Data Extraction

The selection process followed a two-stage approach. First, two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts against the inclusion criteria. Second, the full texts of potentially relevant articles were retrieved and scrutinized for eligibility. Any discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion or by consulting a third senior reviewer.

Data were extracted using a standardized template, which included:

- **Study Characteristics:** Author, year of publication, and geographical region within KSA.
- **Professional Groups:** The specific mix of the six target disciplines.
- **Methodology:** Tool used (e.g., HSOPSC version 1.0 or 2.0) and sample size.
- **Key Findings:** Highest and lowest scoring PSC dimensions.

4. Quality Assessment (Critical Appraisal)

The methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using the **Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT)**. This allowed for a unified quality score across diverse study designs. Studies were evaluated on criteria such as sampling strategy, the validity of the measurement tools, and the appropriateness of the statistical analysis. Studies scoring below a 50% threshold on the MMAT were flagged for sensitivity analysis but generally retained to provide a comprehensive overview of the available regional data.

5. Data Synthesis

Due to the heterogeneity of the professional roles (from field-based paramedics to lab-based epidemiologists), a Narrative Synthesis approach was primarily used. Quantitative data from studies using the HSOPSC were tabulated to compare mean scores across the 12 dimensions of

safety culture, specifically highlighting the variance between technical staff (pharmacy/radiology) and clinical staff (nursing/OR).

IV. Results

The systematic review identified a total of 18 high-quality studies meeting the inclusion criteria, spanning across major Saudi military medical cities in Riyadh, Jeddah, Dhahran, and Tabuk. The results indicate a "moderate" overall perception of safety culture, with the global mean percentage of positive responses (PPR) ranging between **52% and 64%**.

1. Comparative Analysis of PSC Dimensions

The performance across the 12 dimensions of the Hospital Survey on Patient Safety Culture (HSOPSC) revealed significant disparities between organizational strengths and systemic weaknesses.

Table 1: Mean Percentage of Positive Responses (PPR) across HSOPSC Dimensions

HSOPSC Dimension	Mean PPR (%)	Category
Teamwork Within Units	78%	Strength
Managerial Support for Safety	72%	Strength
Organizational Learning	68%	Strength
Communication Openness	51%	Weakness
Staffing Levels	42%	Weakness
Non-punitive Response to Error	34%	Critical Weakness

The data highlights that while internal unit cohesion and managerial intent are high, the actual operational environment is strained. The "Non-punitive Response to Error" scored the lowest, indicating a pervasive fear of retribution that transcends professional boundaries. The low score in "Staffing Levels" (42%) correlates with qualitative findings of burnout, particularly among frontline nursing and paramedic staff.

2. Disciplinary Variance in Safety Perception

Safety culture is not felt uniformly across the six disciplines. Technical and pre-hospital roles reported significantly different safety climates compared to hospital-ward-based roles.

Table 2: Comparison of Safety Perception by Professional Group

Professional Group	Highest Scoring Dimension	Lowest Scoring Dimension	Overall Safety Grade
Nursing	Teamwork Within Units	Staffing Levels	Very Good
Operating Room Teams	Organizational Learning	Handoffs & Transitions	Good
Radiology	Supervisor Support	Non-punitive Response	Acceptable
Pharmacy Technicians	Teamwork Within Units	Non-punitive Response	Acceptable

Acta Biomed 2025; Vol. 96, N. 1: ISSN: 0392-4203 | eISSN: 2531-6745

Paramedics	Teamwork Within Units	Staffing/Communication	Poor/Fair
Epidemiology	Management Support	Communication Openness	Excellent

Epidemiology teams reported the highest safety satisfaction, likely due to their role as safety auditors. Conversely, Paramedics and Pharmacy Technicians scored the lowest in overall safety grades. For paramedics, the "Communication" gap during hospital handovers was cited as a primary risk. For pharmacy technicians, the rigid focus on "Zero Error" in medication dispensing creates a high-pressure environment where any deviation is met with disciplinary scrutiny rather than systemic analysis.

3. Frequency of Event Reporting and Safety Outcomes

The review analyzed the correlation between perceived safety culture and the actual frequency of incident reporting across these specialized areas.

Table 3: Reporting Frequency and Identified Safety Vulnerabilities

Discipline	Frequency of Reporting (High/Low)	Primary Type of Near-Miss Reported	Key Barrier
Radiology	Low	Wrong procedure/Wrong patient	Fear of rank-based reprimand
Pharmacy Techs	High (Mandatory)	Dosage/Labeling errors	Alert fatigue/System lag
OR Teams	Moderate	Sterile field breaches	Surgical hierarchy
Paramedics	Very Low	Medication/Equipment failure	Lack of integrated reporting app
Epidemiology	High	Infection control non-compliance	Administrative delays

There is a clear paradox in reporting: Pharmacy Technicians have high reporting rates only because electronic tracking systems make errors "unhideable," yet they express the most fear regarding the consequences. Radiology and Paramedics exhibit "silent" safety profiles, where near-misses are often handled informally rather than through official channels. This suggests that the military's emphasis on "Zero Defects" may inadvertently be driving reporting underground in these technical sectors.

V. Discussion

The findings of this systematic review provide a nuanced, multidimensional portrait of Patient Safety Culture (PSC) within the Saudi military healthcare sector. By synthesizing empirical data across Nursing, Epidemiology, Radiology, Paramedics, Operating Room (OR) Teams, and Pharmacy Technicians, this discussion interprets the "moderate" overall safety perception (PPR ranging from 52% to 64%) through the lenses of organizational psychology, military hierarchy, and the transformative national mandates of Saudi Vision 2030.

The data suggests that while the military healthcare system possesses strong foundational assets—namely, rigorous protocols and deep peer-to-peer loyalty—it is currently navigating a complex transition from a traditional command-and-control framework to a modern, high-reliability organization (HRO).

1. The Duality of Military Hierarchy and "Siloed" Teamwork

A recurring and striking theme across the reviewed studies is the exceptionally high score in "Teamwork Within Units" (78%), contrasted sharply with alarmingly low scores in "Communication Openness" (51%). In military medical settings, unit cohesion is naturally reinforced by the "esprit de corps" and disciplined training inherent in the armed forces. This sense of collective responsibility creates a resilient horizontal support network where nurses, technicians, and paramedics protect one another during high-stress shifts.

However, the results suggest that this teamwork is heavily siloed. The "Power Distance"—a concept reflecting the extent to which lower-ranking staff accept unequal power distribution—remains a formidable barrier. Lower-ranking staff, particularly in the OR and Radiology, often perceive an insurmountable barrier to questioning the clinical decisions of senior military officers or lead consultants.

In high-reliability organizations, safety is highly dependent on a "flat" communication structure during clinical crises. If an OR scrub nurse or a junior radiology technician feels that "speaking up" about a potential error will be viewed as insubordination or a breach of military etiquette, the final safety barrier is effectively neutralized. While interventions like TeamSTEPPS have been introduced, overcoming deeply ingrained rank-based communication requires sustained, top-down cultural reform.

2. The "Blame Culture" and the Vulnerability of Technical Disciplines

The most critical systemic weakness identified across all six disciplines is the consistently low score for a "Non-punitive Response to Error" (34%). This weakness is most acutely felt among Pharmacy Technicians and Radiology staff. In these technical fields, errors are highly objective and digitally traceable—such as a specific dose logged by a technician in an Automated Dispensing Cabinet (ADC) or a mislabeled digital scan in the PACS system.

The military's historical emphasis on individual accountability can inadvertently foster a "Blame Culture." When errors are treated as individual moral or professional failures rather than symptoms of system design flaws, staff engage in defensive practice and under-reporting. This creates a dangerous "silent safety profile." Near-misses are handled informally off-the-record, meaning the root causes—such as poorly designed software interfaces, alert fatigue, or ambiguous dispensing protocols—remain unaddressed.

According to Reason’s (2000) Swiss Cheese Model, these hidden "latent conditions" eventually align, allowing an error trajectory to reach the patient. Moving forward, the military medical sector must adopt a "Just Culture" algorithm, which clearly distinguishes between unavoidable human error, at-risk behavior, and reckless conduct, ensuring that technical staff are not disproportionately punished for system-level failures.

3. Burnout and Operational Tempo: The Structural Threat to Safety

Acta Biomed 2025; Vol. 96, N. 1: ISSN: 0392-4203 | eISSN: 2531-6745

The low scores in "Staffing Levels" (42%), especially among Paramedics and frontline Nurses, represent a structural threat that transcends individual clinical competence. Saudi military hospitals do not just treat active-duty personnel; they serve as the primary care and tertiary hubs for a vast demographic of military dependents and retirees. This creates a permanent, high-volume "surge" environment.

For Paramedics operating in pre-hospital or tactical settings, understaffing leads to chronic emotional exhaustion and "cognitive tunneling"—a psychological state where a provider under extreme stress fixates on a single task while ignoring broader, critical safety cues. The synthesized data strongly suggests that burnout is a leading predictor of medication administration errors in the field. To achieve the safety goals of Vision 2030, military leadership must shift their paradigm to view adequate staffing not merely as a logistical or budgetary variable, but as a core, non-negotiable safety intervention. A fatigued workforce is inherently an unsafe workforce.

4. Integration Gaps and Handoff "White Spaces"

While clinical care within specific units may be robust, the systematic review highlights significant vulnerabilities during "Handoffs and Transitions." Patient safety incidents are most likely to occur in the "white spaces" between departmental jurisdictions. Key vulnerability points include:

- Paramedic to Emergency Department: The loss of vital pre-hospital clinical data and timeline details during rapid patient transfer.
- Operating Room to ICU/PACU: The fragmentation of surgical narratives and anesthetic complications.
- Pharmacy to Ward: Discrepancies in medication reconciliation upon admission or transfer.

The lack of a unified, multidisciplinary electronic handoff tool—such as the standardized use of SBAR (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation)—across the various branches of the Saudi Armed Forces Medical Services exacerbates this fragmentation. Safety is a multidisciplinary chain, and the data shows that different specialties are often speaking different clinical languages when a patient moves across care boundaries.

5. Epidemiology as the Blueprint for a Generative Culture (Vision 2030)

Amidst these challenges, the high safety scores reported by **Epidemiology** and Infection Control teams offer a viable blueprint for institutional success. Epidemiologists scored highest in "Management Support for Patient Safety." This is largely because their role is deeply integrated into the hospital's continuous improvement loops; they use data (e.g., tracking Healthcare-Associated Infections) not to punish individuals, but to implement systemic "care bundles" and drive overall quality.

This model perfectly aligns with the Saudi Health Sector Transformation Program. The review indicates that military hospitals that actively undergo rigorous external accreditations (like CBAHI and JCI) demonstrate significantly improved management support scores. These external pressures are successfully forcing the hierarchy to prioritize systemic safety over operational speed.

To fully realize the goals of Vision 2030, Saudi military healthcare must continue its evolution from a "Bureaucratic" culture (where safety is about following rules to avoid punishment) to a "Generative" culture (where safety is a core, proactive organizational value, and failure is viewed as a systemic learning opportunity).

VI. Conclusion & Recommendations

Conclusion

This systematic review confirms that the Saudi military healthcare sector possesses a robust foundational framework for patient safety, bolstered by the strategic mandates of Vision 2030. The findings indicate that while "Teamwork Within Units" and "Managerial Support" are significant organizational strengths, the overall safety culture remains in a transitional phase. A critical disconnect exists between institutional policy and the lived experience of the multidisciplinary team. Specifically, the "moderate" safety perception is weighed down by a persistent "Non-punitive Response to Error," which creates a climate of silence—particularly among technical staff like Pharmacy Technicians and Radiologists. Furthermore, the high operational tempo of military medical cities has resulted in staffing shortages and burnout, which now serve as the primary "latent conditions" for systemic failure.

Ultimately, the safety chain is only as strong as its most vulnerable link. While nursing and epidemiology teams are well-integrated into the safety ecosystem, Paramedics and Allied Health professionals remain siloed, facing unique communication barriers during critical handoffs. For the Saudi military sector to achieve high-reliability status, it must move beyond procedural compliance and address the psychological safety and workload sustainability of its entire multidisciplinary workforce.

Recommendations

To bridge the identified gaps and foster a proactive, generative safety culture, the following evidence-based recommendations are proposed for military healthcare leadership:

1. Shift from "Blame" to "Just Culture"

- **Decouple Reporting from Discipline:** Military medical cities should implement a formal "Just Culture" algorithm that distinguishes between human error and reckless behavior. Error reporting should never impact a staff member’s military rank or promotion eligibility.
- **Confidential Reporting Systems:** Enhance existing reporting platforms to allow for anonymous or "de-identified" submissions to encourage transparency among technical staff.

2. Strengthen Multidisciplinary Handoffs

- **Standardized Tools:** Mandate the use of the **SBAR** (Situation, Background, Assessment, Recommendation) tool for all transitions, specifically between pre-hospital Paramedics and the Emergency Department, and between the Operating Room and ICU.
- **Joint Simulation Training:** Conduct regular "Mega-Code" or mass casualty simulations that involve all six disciplines simultaneously to break down professional and hierarchical silos.

3. Optimize Staffing and Well-being

- **Safety-Based Staffing Models:** Move away from fixed ratios toward "acuity-based" staffing that accounts for the high intensity of military patient populations.

- **Burnout Mitigation:** Establish "Resilience Hubs" within hospitals to provide psychological support for frontline staff (especially Paramedics and Nurses) who are at high risk for "second victim" syndrome following adverse events.

4. Integrate Technical Specialties into Safety Leadership

- **Safety Champions:** Appoint dedicated "Safety Leads" within **Radiology** and **Pharmacy** departments to represent these technical perspectives in hospital-wide Quality and Safety committees.
- **Feedback Loops:** Ensure that every incident report filed by a technician results in a "closing the loop" communication, informing the reporter of the systemic changes made because of their input.

5. Data-Driven Surveillance

- **Scale the Epidemiology Model:** Expand the successful data-driven surveillance model used in infection control to track "near-miss" trends in medication dispensing and diagnostic imaging.
- **Real-Time Dashboards:** Implement departmental safety dashboards that reward high reporting rates rather than just low error rates, incentivizing transparency across the facility.

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