

GUIDE

HOP & Healthcare

An adaptive approach for managing risk and enhancing safety in the high-risk healthcare sector.





“Health systems in many parts of the world are failing to meet people’s needs — not because we lack knowledge or resources, but because our systems are fragmented, inequitable, and poorly designed for the realities of today’s world.”

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus —
Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO)

Introduction

Healthcare operates on the edge of failure every day, not because people are careless, but because the systems they work in are complex, adaptive, and often brittle. Practitioners are constantly making things go right in environments where success is anything but certain.

Expanding on Dr. Tedros’s insight above, the disconnect between how we imagine work to be done and how it actually unfolds is not unique to healthcare. All high-risk, complex industries face similar challenges – and are increasingly seeking new, adaptive approaches to meet today’s realities.

The healthcare industry is a vast, high-risk and complex place of work. We know that complex systems are highly hazardous with the possibility of failure around every corner. Yet, despite this, frontline practitioners consistently achieve successful outcomes by skilfully adapting to the demands of their work.

A new approach

Human and Organisational Performance (HOP) is a safety philosophy developed to support high-risk, complex work.

HOP offers healthcare a framework for better understanding how our frontline manages day-to-day work and looks to improve how people and systems interact to manage risk and enhance safety in challenging environments.

In applying HOP philosophies into healthcare, we will see significant improvements in worker and patient safety, as well as enhancing staff well-being and system reliability.

“We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them. Nowhere is this more true than in healthcare, where traditional models are insufficient for today’s complex challenges.”

Peter Senge — Systems scientist and author of The Fifth Discipline

What is HOP?

HOP seeks to challenge more traditional safety approaches and programs, which focus heavily on compliance and punishment after workplace errors. These approaches often fail to improve long-term safety.

Instead, HOP looks to better understand how and why people make mistakes, enabling us to design workplaces that anticipate and mitigate error, rather than simply blaming individuals – one single event at a time.

HOP is based on five core principles that shape and influence the way organisations think, act, view success and respond to failure.

These five principles are integrative and work together to change the way we think about work and how to improve it.

people make mistakes

blame fixes nothing

context drives behaviour

learning is vital

response matters



Let's dive into the HOP principles, and how they relate to healthcare.

People make mistakes

No matter how experienced or well-trained they are, healthcare professionals are still human. Human error is inevitable. In our hospitals and clinics, we continue to see examples such as mislabeled specimens, medication errors, and missed diagnoses. Punishing individuals for unintentional mistakes does little to prevent future ones. Instead, recognising that errors are part of the human condition allows us to shift focus: from blame to learning, and from reaction to proactive system design. Only then can we build safer, more resilient healthcare environments.

Blame fixes nothing

The HOP philosophy seeks to create a culture where errors and near misses are reported and discussed openly, without fear of punishment. The focus shifts from blame to understanding, recognising that insights from frontline staff are essential to improving safety. When healthcare professionals feel safe to speak up, they start to share valuable information about the real conditions and pressures they face. This openness drives deeper learning, enabling proactive improvements that reduce harm and create a safer environment for both patients and frontline staff.

Context drives behaviour

HOP focuses on better understanding the workplace context. Nurses, doctors, and medical staff operate under immense pressure, often due to staffing shortages, time constraints and limited access to necessary equipment, among many other challenges. These stressors directly impact performance. Through HOP, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the real-world conditions within our healthcare system and how frontline staff continuously adapt everyday to make our brittle systems work.

Learning is vital

Every near-miss or error provides a valuable opportunity to improve processes and prevent future harm. HOP fosters a culture of continuous learning by promoting open, non-judgmental discussions, operational learning and effective incident debriefs that prioritise system learning over fault-finding.

Leaders' response matters

HOP challenges how healthcare leaders respond, knowing that if they respond punitively, staff will hide errors. By fostering an open, non-punitive environment, leaders gain deeper insights into the realities of frontline work, allowing them to address system weaknesses and improve patient safety without fear of retribution.



HOP offers healthcare a powerful shift in our current approach towards safety, quality, and error management.

By first accepting that human error is inevitable and focusing on the systems and conditions that influence behaviour, HOP provides the opportunity to move healthcare beyond blame and toward learning, resilience, and continuous improvement.

When HOP principles are embraced into healthcare

- Healthcare staff feel safe to speak up and report issues.
- Leaders respond with support and curiosity, not punishment.
- Healthcare begins to learn from mistakes, near-misses and adapt systems to prevent future harm.
- The focus shifts from individual worker failure to more sustainable system-wide improvement.

“In healthcare, we’ve spent years telling people to ‘just follow the protocol’ — but real life is messy. HOP gave us a way to understand why skilled, well-meaning clinicians sometimes work around systems. It shifted our focus from blaming individuals to improving the context they work in.”

Dr. Sarah Mitchell, Emergency Physician & Safety Lead

What next?

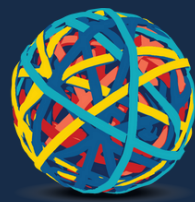
If you or your team feel ready to embrace HOP, the first step is to start to build awareness and understanding of the core principles. Start small, gradually introducing and exposing HOP to a single unit or department, and over time, engaging more influential leaders while expanding the reach to additional teams.

By piloting HOP in a specific area, you can begin shifting mindsets, strengthening knowledge, and identifying key opportunities to improve safety and performance. This approach allows you to create a solid foundation for change before scaling HOP principles across the broader organisation.



HOP builds a culture where patients are **safer**, staff are more **empowered and protected**, and the system is more **adaptive and reliable**.

Find resources, training and pathways to get started at hoplab.org



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