

# Keeping Patients Safe

When it comes to the health and well-being of the people of Oroville, Dr. Matthew Fine plays a particularly large role.

Actually, make that roles.

First, Dr. Fine is a pulmonologist, caring for patients with asthma, COPD, and other respiratory ailments in his part time hospital based office practice.

That would be responsibility enough for many physicians. Dr. Fine, however, has accepted two administrative positions at Oroville Hospital. He is Chief Medical Officer and the hospital's Director of Patient Safety.

Recognizing the importance of each role, Dr. Fine embraces his multitude of tasks.

"There's been a perceived need for physicians to be more involved in (hospital) administration for at least 10 years," Dr. Fine says. "In 1999, a study done by the Institute of Medicine called 'To Err is Human' found that an estimated 100,000 people died annually from errors in hospitals in this country. It started a trend in a specialty area called Patient Safety, to develop ways to prevent these errors. Most of the errors are not due to lack of knowledge, not due to lack of caring, but due to lack of systems that prevent errors."

"That is something I'd always been interested in, but when you have a full-time practice, it's almost impossible to do much about it."

Now he can. He works with other members of the Medical Staff to find common ground in the practice of medicine. With their input, Oroville Hospital has markedly improved its safety record through sets of procedures proven to be effective.

For instance, Oroville Hospital utilizes a process called medication reconciliation. By making a patient's medication record available to providers anywhere within its healthcare system, Oroville Hospital reduces errors of crossover or conflicting medications.

In addition, a dedicated team of nurse practitioners monitor and manage patients on anticoagulant medicines (blood-thinning agents used to prevent or reduce clotting), which cuts down on complications from these potentially dangerous medications. The hospital also has systems of care for specific conditions such as stroke, pneumonia and heart failure to ensure that each patient receives consistent treatment.

These and other steps have made Oroville Hospital one of

the safest in California. Of 335 hospitals reviewed by the Office of Statewide Health, Planning and Development, just 17 – including Oroville Hospital – received better than average ratings in three categories related to lower mortality rates.

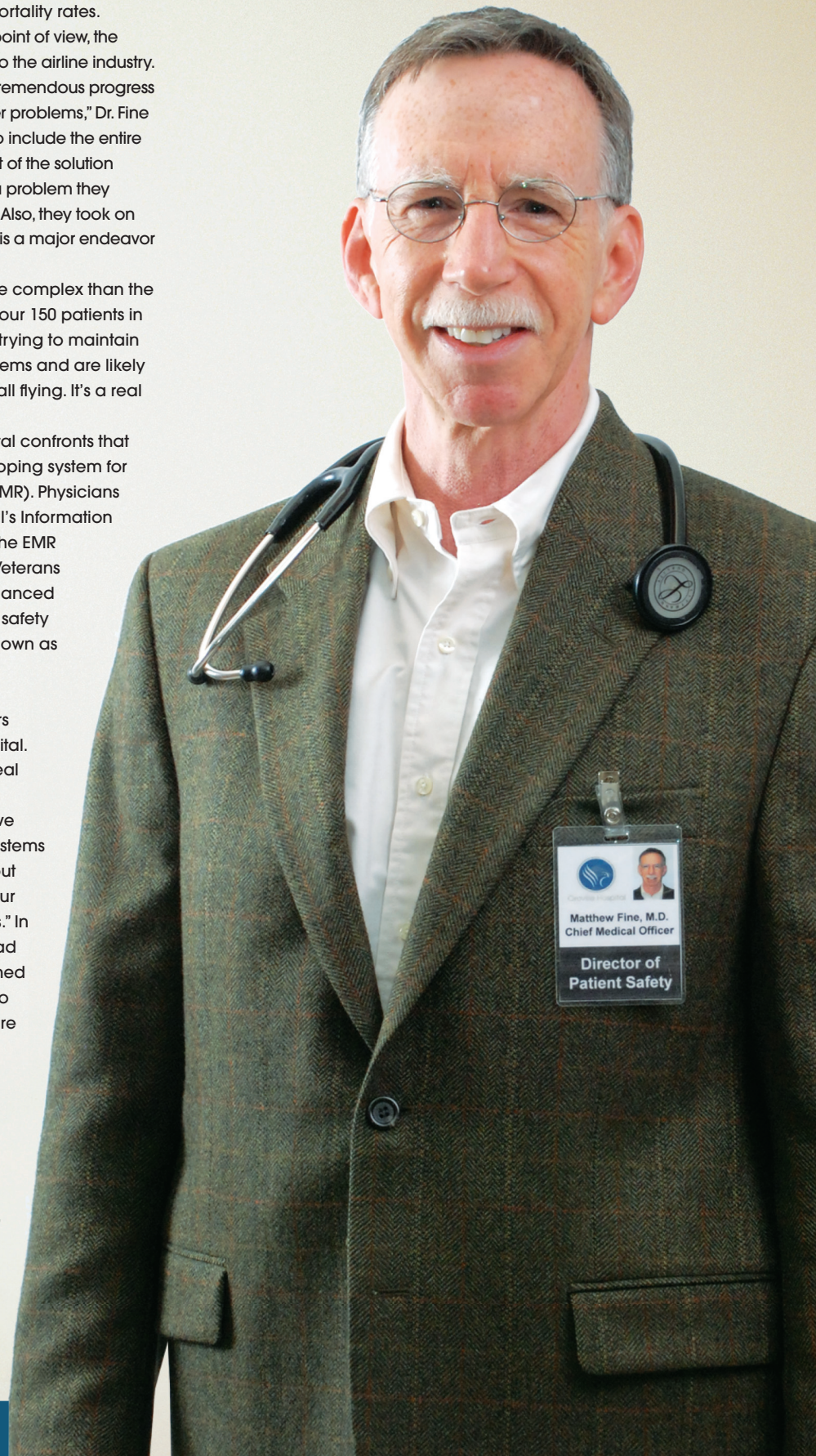
"As far as the patient safety point of view, the hospital industry is compared to the airline industry. The airline industry has made tremendous progress in preventing crashes and other problems," Dr. Fine says. "One change has been to include the entire flight crew, with the pilot, as part of the solution team, so that if anybody sees a problem they can modify the safety process. Also, they took on creating checklists, which now is a major endeavor in patient safety."

However, healthcare is more complex than the airline industry. "If you look at our 150 patients in the hospital, it's like an airline trying to maintain 150 planes that all have problems and are likely to be old, and keeping them all flying. It's a real challenge."

Another way Oroville Hospital confronts that challenge is through its developing system for electronic medical records (EMR). Physicians have teamed with the hospital's Information Technology staff to upgrade the EMR used for decades by the U.S. Veterans Administration. They have enhanced the security features and built safety checklists into the software, known as VistA.

Collaboration is critical. Fortunately, Dr. Fine encounters that spirit throughout the hospital. "We've always had a great deal of camaraderie among the physicians," he explains. "So, we can get together to create systems to improve patient care, without many of the conflicts that occur in other medical communities." In addition, he says, "we have had what I would call an enlightened administration, people who do things in a way that makes care better and more efficient."

"Most of the changes we've implemented have only been because I've been able to get excellent support from the administration, cooperation from the physicians and help from the nurses and other staff."



Oroville Hospital