

Melissa Clarkson PhD MDes MA

advocate for safety and transparency in healthcare

My father, Glenn Clarkson, died after a series of medical errors in a rural Kansas hospital in 2012. When my family began to ask questions and seek reassurance that the hospital was aware of what happened and had taken steps to prevent similar events from reoccurring, we were met with silence and excuses. Our search for answers and accountability soon extended beyond the hospital and into the healthcare system of Kansas. Today, I am an advocate for the disclosure of patient harm, learning from harm events, and honesty and accountability in the healthcare system. As part of my professional activities as an academic researcher in biomedical informatics, I work to raise awareness of ethical issues in the design and deployment of health information technology.

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Patient advocacy activities

Peer-reviewed publications and abstracts

MD Clarkson, H Haskell, C Hellelgarn, PJ Skolnick. "Abandon the term 'second victim'." *BMJ* 2019; 364:l1233. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.l1233>.

MD Clarkson. "Promoting patient safety and responding to patient harm: Opportunities for informatics to advance patient-centered healthcare". Proceedings of the 2019 AMIA Informatics Summit. March 25–29, 2019. San Francisco, CA. Podium abstract.

MD Clarkson and TL Platt. "A view from the floor of the pharmacy: The experience of a severe asthma attack." *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association*. 2023; 63(3):706–707. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.japh.2023.02.014>.

Writing for the public

"Arguments for medical review panels unjustified" (op-ed), *Lexington Herald-Leader*, 4 January 2019, <https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article223950295.html>

Community service leadership positions

Patient Safety Action Network. Leadership committee, February 2020–February 2022.

HealthWatch USA. Executive committee, January 2020–present.

Committee service

Member of the Policy and Advocacy committee of the Collaborative for Accountability and Improvement, August 2017–December 2019.

Member of the Metrics Oversight committee of the Collaborative for Accountability and Improvement, April 2018–August 2019.

Legislative bills and testimony

HB2376 (co-authored with my mother, Nancy Clarkson) that would require disclosure of medical errors, testimony before the Kansas House Judicial Committee, February 2014.

SB96 (co-authored with Nancy Clarkson) that would require disclosure of medical errors, testimony before the Kansas Senate Judicial Committee, January 2016.

Presentations to share my family’s story and perspective

“The Clarksons’ Story: The Patient and Family Perspective”, presented at a training session for communication-and-resolution programs in Lakin, Kansas, by the Collaborative for Accountability and Improvement, March 2018 (video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV0WQJ6znuY>)

“What happens after patient harm? Why one family from Kansas is fighting to stop the secrecy and start conversations”, presented at the HealthWatch USA Conference in Lexington, Kentucky, October 2018 (video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LZxDsOp3rao>)

“Patient harm: The patient and family perspective”, a discussion with University of Kentucky nursing students in NUR 540: Healthcare systems from an interprofessional perspective (instructor: Erin Chiswell, DNP, APRN, FNP-C), March 2019.

Professional service in informatics ethics

Community service leadership positions

Ethical, Legal, and Social Issues Working Group (ELSI) of the American Medical Informatics Association (AMIA). Four years as member of leadership team, including 2 years as Chair (2021–2022). Activities included initiating and organizing the “Health Tech Views and Voices” webinar-panel series, available at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCaLPoKGomNal03AaDTFNzyA>.

Education

PhD in Biomedical and Health Informatics 2014

Department of Biomedical Informatics and Medical Education
University of Washington (Seattle, WA)

Master of Design in Communication Planning and Information Design 2008

School of Design / Department of English
Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, PA)

Master of Arts in Molecular, Cellular, and Developmental Biology 2004

Department of Molecular Biosciences
University of Kansas (Lawrence, KS)

Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry 1998

Bachelor of Science in Microbiology 1998

Department of Biochemistry / Division of Biology
Kansas State University (Manhattan, KS)

Current employment

Assistant Professor 2017–present

Division of Biomedical Informatics, Department of Internal Medicine, College of Medicine
University of Kentucky (Lexington, KY)

I work at the intersection of informatics, design, and life sciences. The goal of my work is to make biomedical information usable by both humans and computers. My research is in the representation of anatomy. My two areas of emphasis are: (a) creating standardized libraries of anatomical graphics for use in clinical and research information systems, and (b) developing a biomedical ontology of human anatomy that will support computational reasoning, be a standard for data integration, and serve as a case study in developing methods for quality assurance in large biomedical ontologies.