

# Tracer methodology

- A key part of The Joint Commission’s on-site survey process
- Uses information from an organization to follow the experience of care, treatment or services for a number of patients through the organization’s entire health care delivery process

Tracers allow surveyors to identify performance issues in one or more steps of the process, or interfaces between processes. The types of tracers used by The Joint Commission during the on-site survey are:

**Individual tracer activity:** These tracers are designed to “trace” the care experiences that a patient had while at an organization. It is a way to analyze the organization’s system of providing care, treatment or services using actual patients as the framework for assessing standards compliance. Patients selected for these tracers will likely be those in high-risk areas or whose diagnosis, age or type of services received may enable the best in-depth evaluation of the organization’s processes and practices.

**System tracer activity:** Includes an interactive session with a surveyor and relevant staff members in tracing one specific “system” or process within the organization, based on information from individual tracers. While individual tracers follow a patient through his or her course of care, the system tracer evaluates the system or process, including the integration of related processes, and the coordination and communication among disciplines and departments in those processes. The three topics evaluated by system tracers are data management, infection control and medication management. Whether all system tracers are conducted varies, but the data use system tracer is performed on every survey.

**Accreditation program-specific tracers:** The goal of these tracers is to identify risk points and safety concerns within different levels and types of care, treatment or services. Program-specific tracers focus on important issues relevant to the organization — such as clinical services offered and high-risk, high-volume patient populations.

# FACT SHEET

**Learn more**

- [Accreditation process overview](#)
- [Standards](#)
- [On-site survey process](#)
- [Unannounced survey process](#)
- [SAFER Matrix™ scoring process](#)
- [Accreditation and Certification Decisions](#)
- [Intracycle monitoring process and focused standards assessment](#)