

Open Communication Information for Patients

Who else will be present?

The person who will be discussing what happened is also able to have someone there to assist and support them. When something goes wrong, it is distressing for the patient and their carer, but it is also traumatic for the healthcare team involved.

Sometimes discussions soon after the event can bring up a number of mixed emotions or feelings. Having someone there who is not as closely involved can help to make the discussion more constructive. This is likely to assist you as well as the immediate healthcare team member.

What will happen afterwards?

As part of the open communication process, if something does go wrong, steps are taken to prevent it from happening again. The hospital will investigate what went wrong. You will be informed of any changes that can be made to reduce the risk of the same thing from happening to someone else.

How can I improve my healthcare safety?

Everyone can play a part in making health care safer. This goes right through from the government who makes high level decisions about the health system, to you as an individual patient/consumer receiving care. The most important way to prevent things from going wrong and to get the best possible care for your needs is to take part in decisions that are made about your treatment.

There are a number of practical ways that you can do so:

- Make sure that you give your healthcare team information about matters that may affect your health care. For example, tell them about all the medicines you are taking, including any non-prescription medicines;
- Collect as much reliable information as you can about your condition, treatment and medicines; and
- Talk to a member of your healthcare team if you have any questions or concerns.



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St John of God Health Care is a leading provider of Catholic healthcare in Australia and bases its care on the Christian values of Hospitality, Compassion, Respect, Justice and Excellence.

Every patient has the right to be treated according to St John of God Health Care's Values of Hospitality, Compassion, Respect, Justice and Excellence while in our care.

We respect this right and are committed to improving the safety and quality of the care we deliver. This is why we have a policy of open communication to assist patients if they experience an adverse event – in other words, if they are unintentionally harmed by their health care.

This brochure aims to inform you (the patient), your family and carer(s) about the open communication process, also referred to as open disclosure. It tells you what to expect if you experience an adverse event during your hospital stay.



What is open communication?

When we visit a healthcare professional, we expect to receive the safest health care available, but sometimes things may not work out as expected. For example, a patient may be accidentally given the wrong dose of medicine, or there may be unintended complications after surgery, meaning the result is not as good as expected.

Most adverse events are minor and do not result in harm. When a patient is harmed, they have a right to know what has happened and why.

If an adverse event occurs, the hospital needs to follow a process of open communication. This means that patients and their family or carer(s) are told, as soon as possible after the event, what has happened and what will be done about it. An important part of the process is to find out what went wrong and to look for ways to help stop it happening again.

What can I expect if something goes wrong?

If something goes wrong during your hospital visit, a member of the hospital team will talk to you and/or your family or carer(s) about what happened. You can also discuss any changes to your ongoing care plan due to the adverse event.

In this situation, you have the right to:

- Have a support person of your choice present at the discussion;
- Ask for a second opinion from another healthcare professional;
- Pursue a complaint process;
- Nominate specific people (family or carer(s)) whom you'd like to be involved in this process; and
- Nominate people whom you DO NOT wish to receive any information.

How can I make the process easier?

To make the process easier, and if you would like, we'll ask you to nominate someone (a member of your family, close friend or hospital patient advocate) to support you during your stay in hospital if something goes wrong.

Your support person should be someone you are:

- Comfortable with and can talk to easily;
- Willing for us to share your personal information with; and
- Sure is able to take the time, if necessary, to be with you in the hospital.

Who at the hospital will speak to me?

The person who talks to you about what happened is likely to be one of the healthcare team looking after you. This may be a doctor, nurse, allied health professional, manager or social worker. However, if you have difficulty talking to this person, you can request someone else.

Ideally this will be someone who:

- You are comfortable with and can talk to easily;
- Has been involved in your care and knows the facts; and
- Has enough authority in the hospital to stop the problem from happening again.

Alternatively, you may want to ask someone from our Pastoral Services to be involved.

