

Levels of response

These are dependent on the level of risk/harm.

- **High Level** – Associated with Extreme A or B incidents (permanent harm or illness and extensive injury, or the potential for the same and sentinel events) and at times High Risk.
- **General Level** – Associated with minimal harm and Low, Medium and High Risk. (Examples include tape tears, skin tears, bruising cannula infection and wrong dose medication.)

Open communication and incident management

These are part of the normal incident process i.e. they are not an additional requirement.

They develop our communication skills as they require sound documentation.

Finally, open communication and incident management support sound processes for increased patient satisfaction.

Open Communication Information for Health Professionals



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Open Communication Information for Health Professionals

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.

Open communication is the discussion we have with patients when things don't go as planned and the patient experiences harm. This process is not new and is often referred to as open disclosure.

Why is it important and necessary?

- Patients and their families value honesty, empathy and compassionate care;
- Patients value sound information about what is happening to them;
- It is ethically and morally the right thing to do; and
- It nurtures a culture that is committed to improving patient care.



What happens when we are not open about things that go wrong?

- Patients perceive that we are not being completely honest;
- Patients believe that we are not listening to them;
- Patients cannot get information about what happened, which is both frustrating and upsetting; and
- There is no acknowledgment of, or expression of regret for what has happened.

What are the aims of open communication?

- To promote a clear and consistent approach by hospitals for the disclosure process following an adverse event.
- To ensure disclosure regarding:
 - What happened;
 - Why it happened;
 - What is being done to prevent a recurrence;
 - Guidance on minimising the risk of a recurrence;
 - Information to generate system improvement; and
 - Promotion of a culture that focuses on safety.

What does open communication involve?

- Open and timely communication;
- Acknowledging the incident/complaint;
- Expression of regret;
- Recognition of the reasonable expectations of patients and their support group regarding their care;
- Support for patients and staff;
- Confidentiality;
- Integrated risk management and systems improvement; and
- Local governance or management.

Is it okay to say sorry?

Each Australian state in which we operate has its own legislation:

Western Australia – Under the *Civil Liability Act 2002* (s5AF) “apology means an expression of sorrow, regret or sympathy by a person that does not contain an acknowledgment of fault by that person.”

Victoria – Under the *Wrongs Act 1958* (s14) “apology means an expression of sorrow, regret or sympathy but does not include a clear acknowledgment of fault.”

New South Wales – Under the *Civil Liability Act 2002* (S68) “apology means an expression of sympathy or regret, or of a general sense of benevolence or compassion, in connection with any matter whether or not the apology admits or implies an admission of fault in connection with the matter.”

What open communication does NOT involve.

- Admitting liability;
- Blaming others;
- Excuses;
- Subjective information / hypotheses; and
- Expressing personal opinions.

