

Manual: Corporate Policy and Procedure
Ref. No.: PP-120
Section: Hospital Administration
Issue Date: November 2023
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Title: Open Disclosure

PURPOSE

To inform staff of the Centaurus Healthcare (CH) corporate policy on Open Disclosure. It is the policy of CH to support a philosophy of open discussion of an adverse event that results in unintended harm to a patient whilst receiving health care at any of its Facilities. Harm may occur at the time or later. This Policy reflects the intent of the National Open Disclosure Standard: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare 2003 and as reprinted in 2008, and of the Australian Open Disclosure Framework 2013 (ACSQHC)

Open disclosure is a function of sound clinical governance and is an element of the CH safety, quality and clinical risk management program that is based on the principle of establishing and maintaining an organisational culture of safety and openness that is focused on systems and performance improvement in a way that is just, flexible and based on learning from adverse events.

Open disclosure is integral to engaging patients in their care and ensures any information provided is in a readily understandable form.

SCOPE

This policy applies to all CH facilities and business units.

POLICY

The Centaurus Healthcare policy on Open Disclosure is:

- CH supports a philosophy of open discussion of an adverse event - an incident in which unintended harm resulted to a person receiving healthcare; reflecting the intent of the National Open Disclosure Standard (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare).
- Medical practitioners, Visiting Medical Officers and staff function in accordance with the CH philosophy of open disclosure whilst taking account of the rights of all the parties concerned, including patients.
- Communication on the part of the facility and/or the private treating doctor following an adverse event is conducted in an open, honest and consistent way with patients and their carers.
- Open disclosure and an apology (“I’m sorry” or “we are sorry”) is not an admission of liability.
- The timing of the disclosure is a matter for the facility and/or the private treating doctor, based on a number of factors, including:
 - The extent to which the facts of the event are known
 - When the facts of the event are known
 - The availability of expert advice, if required
 - The availability of, and if the private treating doctor is to disclose or be involved jointly with the facility in the disclosure
- Privacy issues are to be considered when decisions are made about the timing, location and participants in the process of open disclosure. These are matters for resolution on a case by case basis
- Confidentiality and regard for the privacy of all concerned with an adverse event is the responsibility of all parties, and is to be maintained.
- Open disclosure is to be documented on the patient incident report in RiskClear and in the patient medical record (if an inpatient at the time of disclosure).
- Patients and staff, who are involved in clinical incidents and/or consequent open disclosure, may require support.

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PRINCIPLES OF OPEN DISCLOSURE

Australian Open Disclosure Framework:

1 Open and timely communication

If things go wrong, the patient, their family and carers should be provided with information about what happened in a timely, open and honest manner. The open disclosure process is fluid and will often involve the provision of ongoing information.

2. Acknowledgement

Adverse events should be acknowledged to the patient, their family and carers as soon as practicable.

3. Apology or expression of regret

As early as possible, the patient, their family and carers should receive an apology or expression of regret for any harm that resulted from an adverse event. An apology or expression of regret should include the words 'I am sorry' or 'we are sorry', but must not contain speculative statements, admission of liability or apportioning of blame. An apology is not an admission of liability.

4. Supporting, and meeting the needs and expectations of patients, their family and carer(s)

The patient, their family and carers can expect to be:

- Fully informed of the facts surrounding an adverse event and its consequences
- Treated with empathy, respect and consideration
- Supported in a manner appropriate to their needs.

5. Supporting, and meeting the needs and expectations of those providing health care

An environment should be created in which all staff are:

- Encouraged and able to recognise and report adverse events
- Prepared through training and education to participate in open disclosure
- Supported through the open disclosure process.

6. Integrated clinical risk management and systems improvement

Thorough clinical review and investigation of adverse events and adverse outcomes should be conducted through processes that focus on the management of clinical risk and quality improvement.

Outcomes of these reviews should focus on improving systems of care and be reviewed for their effectiveness. The information obtained about incidents from the open disclosure process should be incorporated into quality improvement activity.

7. Confidentiality

Policies and procedures should be developed with full consideration for patient and clinician privacy and confidentiality, in compliance with relevant law (including federal, state and territory privacy and health records legislation).

PROCEDURE

1. Incident Detection and Notification

Adverse Events may be identified via a variety of mechanisms:

- Staff or a doctor at the time or retrospectively
- Patient or family/carer feedback

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- RiskClear Incident Management System
- Complaint mechanism
- Clinical Audit
- Clinical review systems and processes

The management of the incident is in accordance with CH Policy on Incident Management, and will include:

- Providing prompt clinical care to the patient to prevent further harm
- Assess the incident for severity of harm
- Notifying relevant personnel, i.e the treating medical officer, next of kin, carer, and internal notifications i.e. Nurse Unit Manager, ADON, EDON or CEO
- Initiation of an appropriate response / investigation
- Providing support for staff
- Ensuring privacy and confidentiality of patients and clinicians is observed
- Entry of the incident into the RiskClear Incident Management System
- Signaling the need for open disclosure

The process of when to disclose

- Open disclosure **must occur if a patient is harmed. It should occur as close as possible to the actual event.**
- Disclosure is discretionary in the case of a near miss, being an incident that did not reach the patient and/ or in which there is a potential for harm from ongoing risk. Factors to consider are timeliness and/ or whether it is felt the patient would benefit from knowing.
- The timing of the disclosure, which is a matter for the facility and/or the private treating doctor based on a number of factors, including:
 - The extent to which the facts of the event are known
 - When the facts of the event are known
 - The availability of expert advice, if required
 - The availability of, and if the private treating doctor is to disclose or be involved jointly with the facility in the disclosure
- The most appropriate location for the disclosure to occur.

2. Preparing for Open Disclosure

The decision to disclose an incident must consider the following:

- Whether a discussion between parties (CEO, EDON and medical practitioner) is required to prepare for open disclosure
- Who should disclose to the patient/carers is determined by the circumstances under which the need to make the disclosure arise and the respective roles and responsibilities of the private doctor and CH under these circumstances.
- For formal open disclosure processes, no other CH staff member (other than the facility nominated representative) is permitted to discuss the adverse event with the patient or any person representing the patient.
- It is encouraged that disclosure be completed in a collaborative way, and be led by the most appropriate person in a senior leadership role, with the knowledge and skills to facilitate the disclosure discussion.
- Whether the disclosure be a joint process involving the treating doctor and facility.
- If the circumstance giving rise to the disclosure relates to medical care and treatment, then the treating specialist should lead the disclosure.

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- If the circumstance giving rise to the disclosure relates to services provided by the hospital, then the Facility should lead the disclosure.
- The gathering of all the necessary information
- Identification of a contact person for the patient, their family and carers – if required

3. Open Disclosure Discussion

The elements of open disclosure discussion are:

- An apology or expression of regret
- A factual explanation of what happened
- An opportunity for the patient to relate their experience, views and recollection of the incident. This includes providing the opportunity for the patient, their family and carers to describe the personal effects of the adverse event, and to share what matters to them or raise specific questions they would like answered
- A notation of the patient / carer involvement in the process may made in the investigation report.
- The potential consequences
- The steps being taken to manage the event and to prevent recurrence
- When an investigation is being conducted
- The nature of the investigation i.e. RCA, complaint follow up
- The timing of the investigation and how long it will take
- What the patient / carer can expect to be advised of during and following the investigation
- Offer of ongoing support

4. Follow Up

Follow up may include:

- During the investigation, it is encouraged that the hospital keeps in regular contact with the patient / carer
- Ensuring follow-up with the patient, where appropriate
- Agreeing on future care, where applicable
- Sharing the findings of investigations and the resulting practice changes, i.e via the Quality, Risk and Safety Committee, Medical Advisory Committee and the Board of Management (BOM)

5. Completing the Process

Following open disclosure, it may be necessary for the person undertaking the disclosure to:

- Provide the patient, their family and carers with final written and/or verbal communication, including investigation findings (whichever is preferred by the patient)
- Communicate the details of the adverse event, and outcomes of the open disclosure process, to other relevant clinicians

6. Maintaining Documentation

Recording of disclosure is to be recorded into the RiskClear Patient Incident form and clinical record

Documentation is to include the following:

- Date and time of disclosure
- The full name and position of the person/s who made the disclosure
- To whom the disclosure was made (full name/s) and their relationship to the patient.

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- A brief outline of the discussion
- The agreed outcomes
- Further follow up

TRAINING

Open disclosure training is required to be completed by all clinical staff on commencement of employment/ orientation.

REFERENCES

- Australian Open Disclosure Framework: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare(2013)
- Key Differences Between the Australian Open Disclosure Framework and the Open Disclosure Standard: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare (2013)
- Open Disclosure Principles, Elements and Process: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare (2013)
- Saying Sorry, A guide to apologising and expressing regret during open disclosure: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare (2013)
- National Open Disclosure Standard: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare(July 2003 and reprinted 2008)
- Australian Private Hospitals Association Position on Open Disclosure
- Open disclosure Handbook. Clinical excellence Commission (2014)

REVIEW / CONSULTATION

Chief Executive Officer

Executive Director of Nursing

Board of Management

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