

Open disclosure

Open disclosure is a discussion and an exchange of information, governing the way healthcare professionals communicate with patients who have experienced harm during their care.

Guiding principles of the Australian Open Disclosure Framework

- ▶ Open and timely communication
- ▶ Acknowledgement of the adverse event as soon as practical
- ▶ Offering an apology using the words 'I am sorry' without admission of liability
- ▶ Supporting and meeting the needs and expectations of the patient
- ▶ Supporting and meeting the needs and expectations of those providing healthcare
- ▶ Integrated clinical risk management and systems improvement
- ▶ Good governance systems and processes established prior to adverse event
- ▶ Confidentiality

Is open disclosure mandatory?

Health service organisations accredited to the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (including public and private hospitals, day surgery units and dental clinics) must implement open disclosure in accordance with the Australian Open Disclosure Framework.

These organisations will have their own open disclosure policies and procedures, and if you practise in one of these contexts you may be required by the organisation to participate in open disclosure activity. Ensure you are familiar with your organisation's policies and procedures on open disclosure.

For practitioners in private practice, open disclosure is good professional practice. The Medical Board of Australia's Good medical practice: a code of conduct for doctors in Australia states that:

When adverse events occur, you have a responsibility to be open and honest in your communication with your patient, to review what has occurred and to report appropriately.

Documentation

At all stages in the process, thorough, contemporaneous and accurate documentation is imperative. Only relevant clinical information should be included in the patient record.

Incident investigation processes and outcomes should not be filed in the patient record but in a separate secure location. Record facts objectively and avoid words that suggest apportionment of blame.

Checklist

- Acknowledge the event has occurred.
- Apologise:
 - 'I'm sorry this has happened'
 - 'I'm sorry this hasn't turned out as expected'
- Outline the facts.
- Actively listen to the patient's response.
- Provide information about the investigation and future prevention.
- Document.