**Communication, Apology, and Resolution (CARe)**

SAMPLE LETTERS AND DOCUMENTATION

**General response letter samples** *(Grievance response or a follow-up to an in-facility disclosure, etc.)*

Dear [name],

I am writing in follow-up to your [family member] recent visit to [facility] [site/ location]. The care we provide to each of our patients is very important to us as we strive to continuously improve. When unexpected complications happen, we carefully review the care we provided and are open to sharing what has been learned.

We follow a process known as CARe (Communication, Apology, Resolution) which is a framework to review unexpected outcomes or concerns about the medical care we provided, and to both listen to and respond to patient and family questions and concerns. The care you [family member] received at [facility] [site/ location] will be reviewed as part of this process. We will then notify you by letter when our review is finished. This letter will include an invitation to meet with some of the providers and an opportunity for you to ask questions and learn the results of our review.

In the meantime, if you have any specific concerns you would like us to address in our review or if you have any other questions, we welcome hearing from you. Please feel free to call me at [phone number] at your convenience.

Sincerely,

[name], [title]

Dear Mr./ Ms. [name]:

Please accept this letter as acknowledgment of our receipt of your letter dated [date]. We are very sorry to learn about your dissatisfaction with the care we provided. We at [office/specialty] and throughout [health care system] take such concerns and complaints very seriously.

The care we provide to each of our patients is very important to us as we strive to continuously improve. When unexpected or adverse events happen to our patients, we have a process to review the care provided and then share with our patient the information that is learned.

Since receiving your letter, we have initiated such a review of the care we provided you. Upon completion of this review, we will contact you and offer to share the findings of our review with you and respond to your request for financial compensation.

If you have any questions in the interim or wish to provide us with any additional information, please do not hesitate to call. I can be reached at [phone number].

Sincerely,

[name], [title]

**Sample letter for patient/family member unresponsive to resolution conversation contact**

Dear [name],

We are deeply sorry for your experience at [facility] on [date]. We did not deliver the care that we strive to and know that you were harmed. We would like to discuss the event and our investigation into the causes of the harm you experienced and speak with you about what we can do to help you.

We know that you may not want to talk with us right now. But, if at any point it would be helpful to understand more about what happened and what is being done to prevent it from happening again, we are here to answer any questions you may have. We welcome a meeting and discussion with you and anyone who you would like there to support you.

Sincerely,

[name], [title] *(Patient safety/Risk/Patient relations staff member)*

**Sample required event notification letter**

Dear [name],

Thank you for your patience with us as we worked to better understand the causes of [the event you experienced] during your recent hospitalization here at [facility]. As promised in an earlier letter and in our discussions, I am writing to give you the results of the investigation we have completed.

We determined that the medical event did meet the criteria of a Serious Reportable Event as outlined by the Department of Public Health, which means it is something that they want to know about for general health care tracking and future policy development. [However, our investigation found that the event was not preventable – there was nothing we could have done at the time to stop it from happening, although we are very sorry that it did happen.] OR [We found that the event was preventable. We are very sorry that this happened, and we have put the following in place to minimize the chances of it happening again…]

We would like to work with you to help repair the injury and losses you have incurred because of this preventable event through our CARe Program, which you have already heard about in our previous discussions. [Refer to materials if needed]

The full report of our review that was submitted to the DPH is also attached here. Should you have any questions about the report, please contact the patient relations department at [contact info].

Please know that [facility] is committed to providing you with timely and quality care, and to constantly improving our practices to ensure patient safety.

Sincerely,

[name], [title]

**Sample letter summarizing resolution conversation**\*

Dear [name],

Thank you very much for coming to our office to meet with me and [names of people at meeting]. I appreciate the time you took, but more importantly, the thoughtfulness you demonstrated as we discussed very tough issues. I hope we were able to answer your questions.

I cannot imagine how difficult [the event family member experienced] must have been for you, but I want you to know that your feedback is critical to our ability to improve. We are committed to continual improvement and the lessons from this event have not been lost on us. I would like you to consider my invitation to be videotaped so we can use your story in our continuing education efforts.

Someone at our recent meeting questioned whether [family member] should have had an EKG when he was admitted. Of course, knowing what we all know now about his heart, it would have been great to have a full cardiac workup on admission; the reality was that no one suspected that [family member’s] heart was double the normal size for a man of his age and size. To accomplish an EKG, he probably would have had to be restrained or sedated. Both options risk other possible disastrous consequences and there was no reason to believe that he had a cardiac condition. On balance, we believe it was reasonable for our staff not to try and obtain an EKG at the time of his admission. Our reviews also suggested that an EKG alone might not have disclosed his cardiac condition.

The tougher question is whether better monitoring would have changed this very unexpected outcome. On that question, we are very conflicted. Had his nurses, for instance, checked his vital signs every three hours, it still would have been pure chance that they would have checked him precisely at the time he had his unexpected cardiac arrest. The monitoring he received included monitoring the sound of his breathing, but no one suspected that the absence of snoring meant he was in cardiac arrest. Our experts have advised us that more attentive monitoring would not likely have prevented [family member’s] unexpected cardiac arrest and death. Our conclusion is that the hidden cardiac condition was going to prove fatal to him even if our staff had done all that was reasonably expected of them.

I am sorry that [family member] died and I am sorry that you and all those who survived him have lost him. I am exceptionally sorry your loss has been compounded by care that was less-than-ideal. You had enough to cope with – dealing with gaps in his care made the tragedy that much more difficult and for that, I am sincerely sorry.

[name], [title]

**Sample letter responding to written inquiry** *(when meeting/discussion could not occur)* \*

Dear Mr./ Ms. [name]:

Our investigation revealed that [family member] likely had an injury to the back of her head from her car accident. She presented to [facility] in a cervical collar from an outside institution for suspected cervical spine fractures. The emergency room physician smartly deferred manipulation and examination of her head/neck in light of the reported cervical spine fractures; far better for [family member] that they were careful of her spinal cord, possibly at the risk of missing a scalp laceration.

Per your letter, you said [family member] has a scar, indentation and area where hair does not grow back on her scalp, and was forced to endure painful turning to have the dressing changed. [family member] would have had a scar and probably an indentation from her injury. Because of her limited mobility, she also would have been turned with great frequency as an inpatient.

We are sorry that [family member] experienced this complication from her initial accident, and that your family was anxious seeing her in pain and participating in the wound care. The good news is that she avoided paralysis and other major neurological injury, even if it led to a less-than-optimal cosmetic result of the relatively small injury to the back of her head. Mindful of your disappointment of care to that area, we wrote off any uncovered costs associated with the wound care, but we do not believe further compensation is warranted.

I recognize that you disagree with and will be disappointed by our analysis. If the two of you would like to come in to meet with us to discuss this further, we would do our best to keep an open mind; however, I am confident that in reaching this conclusion, we have carefully considered the claims in your letter, and your view of the situation as described to me over the phone.

Sincerely,

[name], [title]

\*Thank you to the University of Michigan Health System for providing these examples.