

Sample communication policy

COMMUNICATION, APOLOGY AND RESOLUTION (CARE)

After an adverse event, immediately notify the attending (if applicable) and your supervisor.

Adverse events must be communicated to patients/families when:

- You would want to know about the event if it had happened to you or a relative
- The event may result in a change in treatment, either now or in the future

Communication should occur as soon as possible (within hours, not days).

Experts are available for advice and assistance:

- During the day notify XXX.
- During off hours notify XXX.

Other resources available for communication assistance: Social work, risk management, administrator on call, ethics support service.

Preparing to communicate with the patient and family

- Involve the attending in planning, notification and follow up.
- Prepare yourself emotionally.
- Review what you will say with the attending.
- DO NOT have this conversation alone — include a colleague, nurse or senior nurse

In the meeting

- Silence or sign out your beeper. Choose a quiet private location where everyone can sit. (Consider moving the patient to a private room if one is available.)
- Present just the facts as they are known at this time. Do not go into details about how and why until the information is clearly known. Avoid medical jargon.
- Avoid speculation, especially about causation. Use phrases like, “As best we know at the moment.”
 - Show empathy and compassion for the patient/family member. Listen actively. Allow for silence. Be sensitive to the family’s readiness to talk.
 - Recognize and acknowledge that a loss occurred. Do not blame “the system” or colleagues.
- Assure the patient/family that the hospital:
 - will continue to care for the patient.
 - is committed to discovering what happened
 - will keep them informed as the understanding of the events becomes clear
- If the patient/family asks about financial compensation, explain that you are not in a position to address those issues but that others who will speak with them in the near future.

Documenting the event and the outcome of the meeting

- Document in the patient’s medical record:
 - The facts as they are presently known
 - Details and results of the communication of the event to the family, and the participants involved in the communication (not your conversations with risk management or patient safety).

Note: “Near miss” events (errors that did not reach the patient or do not result in injury) do not require communication with the family but should be communicated to your supervisors to prevent possible future injuries.

What is an adverse event?

An adverse event is an injury that was caused by medical management rather than the patient’s underlying condition. Not all adverse events are the result of medical error.