

Disclosing Adverse Events



Prepare

Gather the facts

- Communicate with relevant members of staff
- Decide whether the patient will be informed or family (if patient is not in a condition to be told)

Plan what you will say

- Review and rehearse the plan for telling the patient (or family) what happened, and how you will express regret and respond to the patient's emotional reaction
- Be sensitive to patient's (or family's) cultural or language needs
- Consider your own emotions and whether you will disclose alone or with a member of staff



Acknowledge & apologise

- Be open and transparent
- Acknowledge that an unexpected incident has taken place
- Express your regret and offer a sincere apology to the patient



Provide information

- Be honest and open when providing information related to the incident
- Provide all the facts that are known to date about the incident
- Provide known facts- avoid blame
- Describe the current clinical condition and what will happen next
- Confirm that the patient/(or family) understands the information provided-repeat if necessary



Analyse & investigate what happened

Reassure the patient (or family) that an investigation will be conducted to further understand why or how the incident occurred

Inform the patient they will be kept up to date with progress of investigation- arrange a follow up meeting (where appropriate)

Prevent further harm/future events

Provide information on the next clinical steps

Reassure the patient of the steps which will be taken to prevent future recurrences to patients



Manage patient's emotions with an empathetic response

- Acknowledge the patient's (or family's) concerns and feelings (e.g. frustration, anger, shock)
- Let the patient (or family) know you understand why he or she is upset
- If the patient (or family) reacts with anger, be empathetic and do not respond with defensiveness
- Respond honestly to patient's (or family's) questions
- Offer any support or help



Follow up in writing & provide any updates (where appropriate)

- Provide the same information in writing & provide updates on the investigation

This advice is based on the Duty of Candour principles and SPIKES training for communicating difficult information.