

Communicating in the Aftermath of an Adverse Event

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

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

Near Misses (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.

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.

Present just the facts as they are known at this point in 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.
- Express sympathy and apologize as appropriate. Use phrases like, “*I’m so sorry this happened to you.*”
- 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 are 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).