Communiqué from Health Complaints Commissioners

Health Complaints Commissioners from across Australia strongly support implementation of “Open Disclosure” in all jurisdictions.

Open disclosure is the open discussion of incidents that result in harm to a patient during health care.

Developed for use in all health services, Open Disclosure forms part of the ten National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards being introduced by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC). It applies to all high risk health services, including public and private hospitals, seeking accreditation from 1 January 2013 and includes requirements to say ‘sorry’ and provide good explanations for the incident that has occurred and how it will be remedied.

At their half yearly meeting in Hobart last week, Health Complaints Commissioners were updated by the ACSQHC on progress towards implementing this and other national quality standards.

The Commissioners agreed that open disclosure is a means by which patients and their families are treated with respect after an adverse event. It is the right thing to do. Further, effective open disclosure will increase public confidence in the health system and may reduce complaints.

Background

Health Complaints Commissioners from across Australia and New Zealand, as well as the Aged Care Commissioner, meet twice a year to discuss issues of common concern.

At the Hobart meeting on 21 and 22 November 2013, Commissioners were also briefed on:

- the creation of a Health Ombudsman in Queensland and the changes to the manner in which health complaints will be dealt with in that state;
- research on the use of anti-psychotic drugs in aged care facilities; and
- research on the need to improve communication with patients and their families at the end of a patient’s life.

Key issues discussed included:
• The interaction of health complaints schemes in Australia, including with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA) and the Aged Care Complaints Scheme.

• The operation of complaint handling between Commissioners and AHPRA, with a view to informing the upcoming review of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for health practitioners.

• Proposals to deliver a national oversight scheme in relation to unregistered health practitioners.

• The role of regular audits in ensuring that health service providers deliver on the changes necessary to improve the quality of health services.

For further information on the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards, see www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/open-disclosure/ or contact Amy Winter on (02) 9126 3600 or mail@safetyandquality.gov.au

Health Complaints Commissioners

Australian Capital Territory: Health Services Commissioner Mary Durkin – media on (02) 6205 2222

New South Wales: Health Care Complaints Commissioner Kieran Pehm – media on (02) 9219 7444

New Zealand: Health and Disability Commissioner Anthony Hill – media on +64 21 27 432 6709

Northern Territory: Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner Lisa Coffey – media on (08) 8999 1969

Queensland: Chief Executive Officer, Health Quality and Complaints Commission, Adjunct Professor Cheryl Herbert – media on (07) 3120 5988

South Australia: Health & Community Services Complaints Commissioner Steve Tully – media on (08) 8226 8633

Tasmania: Health Complaints Commissioner and Ombudsman Leon Atkinson-MacEwen – media on (03) 6166 4580

Victoria: Acting Health Services Commissioner Dr Grant Davies – media on (03) 9032 3120

Western Australia: Health and Disability Services Complaints Office Director Anne Donaldson – media on (08) 6551 7620
Other attendees:

New Zealand Health and Disability Commissioner: Deputy Commissioner Disability Rose Wall – media on +64 21 27 432 6709

Aged Care Commissioner (Australia): Aged Care Commissioner Rae Lamb – media (03) 9665 8033