

Communicating with your healthcare provider when you are in hospital

▶ An information sheet for consumers

Why is this important?

Effective communication with your healthcare provider is essential to ensuring that the care you receive is safe, of a high-quality, and centred around you, the patient.

Effective communication with your healthcare provider has been shown to:

- prevent harm during your care
- reduce the possibility of you needing to return to hospital after you've been discharged and
- positively influence your health outcomes.¹

When you are in hospital, you will have a number of different healthcare providers looking after you. Depending on your care needs, you may be transferred to different parts of the hospital before you are discharged. When your care is transferred from one healthcare provider to another, this is known as a 'transfer of care' or 'transitions of care'. For example:

- when there is a change of doctors or nurses (at shift change)
- if you are moved to the general ward after surgery
- if you go for a test or procedure
- when you are discharged from hospital.

Effective communication between you and your healthcare provider at transfers of care is important to minimise the risk of communication errors and information being lost or miscommunicated.

What can I do to more effectively communicate with my healthcare provider?

You are central to your care and have an important role in ensuring that your care goals, preferences and needs are met.

You have a right to involve your family members, carers or advocate in any communication or decision about your care. This is particularly important if you are critically ill or need assistance to communicate.

This information sheet outlines what you can do to support effective communication with your healthcare provider.

“ It's your life and it is important to know what is going on ”

Consumer²

Ways to communicate and participate at transitions of care

If your healthcare provider changes or you are moved to a different room or part of the hospital:

- Let your healthcare provider know if you need a support person present or assistance to communicate (e.g. an interpreter).
- Let your healthcare provider know about the medicines you are taking, and if you have any allergies or reactions to medicines.
- Ask your healthcare provider what to do, or who to contact, if you have questions or problems about your health or the care you are receiving.
- Speak up if you have any questions or concerns about your care, or any transfers of care.
- Tell your healthcare provider if you experience any changes to your health. If your family or carer notices a change, they should let the healthcare provider know.
- Discuss with your new healthcare provider your preferences, expectations and goals of care, including if you have an Advance Care Plan.³

An Advance Care Plan is a documented agreement about your future care if you become too unwell or lose your decision-making capacity. A good website to help you plan ahead is Start2Talk, available at: <http://start2talk.org.au>

If you are going for a test or procedure:

- Ask for more information if you are uncertain about any part of the test or the procedure. This could include asking:
 - How is the test done?
 - How will it feel?
 - Do I need to do anything to get ready for it?
 - How long will it take to get the results?
 - How will I get the results?
 - Where can I get trusted information about the tests you've ordered?
 - How will the results be shared with other doctors/services involved in my care?
 - What is likely to happen after the test or procedure?⁴

When you are being discharged from the hospital:

- Ask your healthcare provider to explain the plan that you will follow at home, any new medicines you will be taking, and whether you need to make any follow-up appointments.
- Discuss with your doctor or nursing staff any concerns you have about being discharged.
- If you have questions that still have not been covered, ask your healthcare provider if there is information you can take with you, or where you can get more information.
- Ask for contact details for someone on the ward, in case you have any immediate post-discharge concerns.
- If your Discharge Summary isn't provided to you, ask for a copy of it.³

A Discharge Summary is a written document that summarises why you came into hospital, the care you received, the plan of action when you leave the hospital, and lists any follow-up appointments. The hospital should send your Discharge Summary electronically to your GP.

In case your GP hasn't received an electronic copy of your Discharge Summary, you should bring a copy of your Discharge Summary when you next visit your GP.

What can I expect?

You have a right to be treated with dignity and respect and to be actively involved in your care to the extent that you choose.

You can expect healthcare providers to communicate with you about your care, and for that communication to be two-way, clear, open, honest, and offered in a way you can understand.

To meet the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards, hospitals should aim to:

- demonstrate leadership and commitment to person-centred care at all levels of their organisation
- support everyone working in the hospital to engage with patients, families, carers and advocates at transfers of care
- support patients, families, carers and advocates to participate and communicate with their healthcare provider at transfers of care
- provide information about transfers of care in a way that is easy to understand.

The Australian Charter of Health Care Rights also sets out what you can expect from the health system. The Charter is available at <http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/national-priorities/charter-of-healthcare-rights/>

References

1. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Engaging patients in communication at transitions of care. Prepared by a consortium from Deakin and Griffith Universities. Sydney: ACSQHC, 2015.
2. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Consumer Research regarding the Safety and Quality of Health Care. Prepared by Woolcott Research. Sydney: ACSQHC, 2014.
3. National Transitions of Care Coordination. Your Rights During Transitions of Care: A guide for Health Care Consumers and Family Caregivers. Washington DC: NTOCC, 2008-2016.
4. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Be more involved in your health care: Tips for Patients. Rockville, MD: AHRQ, 2011.



More information

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care recognises the importance of effective communication between healthcare providers and their patients (including, carers, families and consumer advocates). Programs that support this work include:

- Clinical Communications
- Health Literacy
- Patient and Consumer Centred Care
- Shared Decision Making
- Open Disclosure.

More information about these programs is available at www.safetyandquality.gov.au

Other publications in this series

- Patient-clinician communication in hospitals: Communicating for safety at transitions of care - An information sheet for senior executives and clinical leaders
 - Patient-clinician communication in hospitals: Communicating for safety at transitions of care - An information sheet for healthcare providers
 - Consumer posters: Communicating with your healthcare provider - Why it is important and what actions can I take?
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