

Information for Patient, family/carer about adverse events and open disclosure

What are adverse events?

Providing health care can be a very complicated process requiring highly skilled professionals. While everything is done to ensure that high-quality and safe care is provided to all patients, sometimes things go wrong and unanticipated outcomes might occur.

At *Epworth* we refer to these incidents as adverse events and take them very seriously. 'Adverse event' means an incident in which harm resulted to a person receiving health care¹.

What causes adverse events to occur?

Sometimes adverse events occur because someone has made a mistake or a unique flaw has appeared in a process or system that had not been evident before. Although these types of adverse events often get a lot of publicity in the media, they are extremely rare when one considers just how many procedures and episodes of health care occur each year in Victorian hospitals.

On most occasions the outcome just could not be anticipated. This is perhaps because of the very nature of illness and disease and the complexity of health care as we know it today.

What do we do about adverse events?

Although rare, every adverse event at *Epworth* is documented and recorded. We have a number of committees and processes that are responsible for investigating adverse events and ensuring that we learn from these and put in place any necessary changes to prevent these from occurring again.

Our aim is to continually improve to ensure the health care we deliver is the best it can be.

Extensive research has been undertaken throughout the world into the causes of adverse events and what can be done to reduce their frequency and impact. The research has found that there are some key principles to managing adverse events that are important to ensure that our staff are confident to admit when something has gone wrong and do not 'cover up' adverse events.

We call this the 'no-blame approach' and it is very important to ensure that everyone involved in the adverse event feels comfortable about speaking up so we can identify and eliminate factors that contribute to adverse events to improve our systems and processes.

At *Epworth* we encourage our staff, as well as patients and their family or carers to identify and report **when things go wrong or when patients are harmed** so that care can be improved.

What is Open disclosure?

Open disclosure is open discussion about incident(s) that happened during care which caused harm to a patient, with the patient, their family, carers and other support personsⁱⁱ.

What can I expect if an adverse event happens to me?

If you are harmed during your treatment, a meeting will be arranged between you (and your family or carers) and the senior health service staff to discuss what happened. It is most likely that at the time you are informed, we will not have all the information at hand but we will advise you about what we are doing to obtain more information.

If you are not in a condition to receive the information, for example you are still recovering from an anaesthetic, we will inform the person named by you on your admission form. If there is anyone in particular who you want to be contacted, you should advise us. Your privacy and confidentiality are paramount and we will only speak to those people who you have consented to.

Often patients are aware that something might have gone wrong and should discuss any concerns with their treating doctor. If we are aware of an adverse event, we will talk to you about setting up a formal meeting. This way, you can have any family members or carers present and ask any questions you like. It is quite natural to feel angry and disappointed and you should express your feelings to those present.

During the open disclosure process, the health service staff will:

- Tell you what they know about the incident
- Explain what went wrong and, where possible, why things went wrong
- Apologise or express regret
- Provide you with support appropriate to your needs
- Develop a plan with you, which will list what you wish to achieve from future meetings and any questions you have that you would like followed up.

Why should I come to the meeting?

People who have been harmed by treatment often say that they cope much better once they understand what went wrong. By talking to our health service staff in the meeting, you will help them better understand and respond to your needs. Our staff can learn from people who have been harmed whilst in their care. Sharing your experience may help to stop the same harm happening to someone else.

What happens next?

This will depend on the nature of the adverse event. You might require further surgery either during this admission or at a later time. You will be informed about what to expect next at the meeting but should ask any questions you need to. We will also ensure that you have the name and phone number of someone in the hospital to contact if you have further questions or ideas you would like to share with the investigating team about what you think went wrong or relate your experiences to assist with the investigation.

At times we arrange further follow-up meetings and sometimes the patient goes home and we provide further information via letter or a phone call once the results of any investigations are available. You will be given a choice of how you wish to receive the information.

You will also be able to talk to your doctor or someone familiar with your case after discharge.

Can I take things further?

Once the open disclosure process is complete, you might feel satisfied about the process and happy to continue to communicate with your doctor. You also have the right to take the matter further.

You may also access the internal complaints management process of the hospital by either letter or phone by contacting:

Epworth Richmond

Primary contact:

Patient Liaison Officer

Phone: 03 9426 6219

Email: erpatientfeedback@epworth.org.au

Secondary contact:

Executive Director

Epworth Richmond

89 Bridge Road

Richmond VIC 3121

Phone: 03 9426 6666

Epworth Eastern

Executive Director

Epworth Eastern

1 Arnold Street

Box Hill VIC 3128

Phone: 03 8807 7100

Email: eeatientfeedback@epworth.org.au

Rehabilitation and Mental Health Services

Executive Director Rehabilitation and Mental Health

Epworth Hawthorn

50 Burwood Road

Hawthorn VIC 3122

Email: ehatientfeedback@epworth.org.au

Epworth Brighton

Phone: 9591 9200

Epworth Camberwell and Epworth Clinic

Phone: 9809 2444

Epworth Hawthorn

Phone: 9415 5777

Epworth Richmond Rehabilitation

Phone: 9426 6666

Epworth Cliveden

Director Clinical Services

Epworth Cliveden

29 Simpson Street

East Melbourne VIC 3002

Phone: 03 9419 7122

Email: efpatientfeedback@epworth.org.au

Epworth Freemasons

Executive Director

Epworth Freemasons

166 Clarendon Street

East Melbourne VIC 3002

Phone: 03 9483 3833

Email: efpatientfeedback@epworth.org.au

Epworth Geelong

Executive Director

Epworth Geelong

1 Epworth Place

Waurin Ponds VIC 3216

Phone: 03 5271 7777

Email: geelong@epworth.org.au

You can expect your complaint to be acknowledged within 48–72 hours and then a more detailed response letter will follow. Through this process, we can also arrange for further meetings with senior managers of the hospital and/or your doctor if you require.

You also have the right to obtain a copy of your medical record and can do so by contacting the hospital's health information service at the same address above.

The Health Services Commission provides an external service for patients and families dissatisfied with the service. Contact details are: Office of the Health Services Commissioner Complaints and Information Telephone: (03) 8601 5200 Toll-free: 1800 136 066	Email: hsc@health.vic.gov.au Or write to: Health Services Commissioner 30th floor, 570 Bourke St Melbourne Vic., 3000
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ⁱ Australian Open Disclosure Framework: Better communication a better way to care

ⁱⁱ Australian Commission on Quality and Safety in Healthcare