

## Frequently asked questions about Open Disclosure

### What is Open Disclosure?

Open disclosure describes the way clinicians communicate with patients who have experienced harm during health care. Open disclosure is intended to:

- assist patients that have experienced harm
- guide clinicians,<sup>1</sup> the clinical workforce<sup>2</sup> and health service organisations in supporting patients that have experienced harm
- ensure that health service organisations learn from adverse events.

The main elements of open disclosure are:

- an apology or expression of regret, which should include the words 'I am sorry' or 'we are sorry'
- a factual explanation of what happened
- an opportunity for the patient, their family and carer(s) to relate their experience of the adverse event
- a discussion of the potential consequences of the adverse event
- an explanation of the steps being taken to manage the adverse event and prevent recurrence.

Open disclosure is a discussion and an exchange of information that may take place in one conversation or over one or more meetings.

### What is the *Australian Open Disclosure Framework*?

The *Australian Open Disclosure Framework* (the Framework) was released in 2013 by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. The Framework is an updated and revised version of the national *Open Disclosure Standard*, which was released in 2003.

The Framework was developed with input from consumers, clinicians, indemnity insurers, health departments and health service organisations from across the country.

The Framework reflects the latest international and Australian evidence and practice of open disclosure.

It provides a framework for clear and consistent communication by health service organisation staff with patients when health care does not go to plan.

It includes guidance on discussing what has happened, why the incident occurred, and what is being done to minimise the risk of it happening again.

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<sup>1</sup> Clinician is defined as "a healthcare provider, trained as a health professional. Clinicians include registered and non-registered practitioners, or a team of health professionals providing health care who spend the majority of their time providing direct clinical care".

<sup>2</sup> Clinical workforce is defined as "the nursing, medical and allied health staff who provide patient care and students who provide patient care under supervision. This may also include laboratory scientists".

## **Why was the *Australian Open Disclosure Framework* developed?**

The Framework is designed to assist clinicians and health service organisations implementing and practising open disclosure. It provides a nationally consistent basis for open disclosure in Australia.

The Framework encourages greater openness about adverse events in health care so that the causes of events can be understood and changes made to minimise the risk of similar events occurring again. It also means that, whenever and wherever their health care does not go to plan, consumers can expect:

- a full explanation of what occurred
- to be treated with respect and consideration.

When health care does not go to plan, patients and their carers want to know and understand what happened and why.

They want to feel there is genuine regret that the event occurred and they want to know that steps will be taken to minimise the risk of similar events occurring again.

The Framework is designed to assist health service organisations meet these expectations and to communicate them openly and fully with patients following adverse events.

## **Where can patients and consumers find out more about the *Australian Open Disclosure Framework*?**

An open disclosure patient information brochure and booklet are available at [www.safetyandquality.gov.au/opendisclosure](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/opendisclosure)

## **How is the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care assisting with implementation of the *Australian Open Disclosure Framework*?**

The Commission ensures that the Framework reflects the latest evidence, practice and advice on conducting, and participating in, open disclosure.

It makes available a range of resources and materials for public and private facilities that implement and practice open disclosure.

The Framework and support materials are available at [www.safetyandquality.gov.au/opendisclosure](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/opendisclosure)

## **Further open disclosure information**

Further information is available from:

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[www.safetyandquality.gov.au/opendisclosure](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/opendisclosure)

NOTE FAQs for clinicians and for health service managers are also available at [www.safetyandquality.gov.au/opendisclosure](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/opendisclosure)