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The duty of candour
Communicating when things go wrong – a guide for patients, families and carers.

This leaflet gives information on the duty of candour process and what to expect.

The full guideline on duty of candour is available from the CQC website, w: www.cqc.org.uk

This leaflet has been adapted from: Health Service Executive (Ireland), 2013: Open Disclosure

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Date published: September 2019
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A list of sources is available on request
What is the duty of candour?
Healthcare staff should talk with you openly throughout your care. The duty of candour is a formal requirement to be open and honest with a patient when an incident causes or has the potential to cause harm. This means that if you suffer any unexpected or unintended harm during your care we will:
- tell you about it
- apologise
- investigate and offer to share the investigation report
- give an open explanation of what happened.

Why do things go wrong?
Healthcare is very complex and things can change rapidly and unexpectedly. Occasionally things do not go to plan and a patient can be harmed despite our best intentions.

We regret every case of harm to our patients but we make sure we use the opportunity to learn, and stop similar things happening again.

What can I expect?
- A member of staff will speak to you honestly and openly as soon as possible after the event to discuss what happened, your condition and your ongoing care plan.
- All of the facts may not be clear at this time, so staff may not be able to answer all of your questions until we have completed our investigation.
- If you are not in a condition to receive the information, for example if you are too ill or recovering from an anaesthetic, staff will tell your next of kin, or the person named by you in your healthcare record, and will tell you when you are well enough.
- You can involve family members or carers in these discussions.
- You will be treated with dignity and respect and you will receive a sincere apology.
- You can expect to be involved in, and contribute to, the investigation about your care.
- You will normally be given a named person to speak to about any further queries or concerns.
- We will investigate what went wrong and you will be informed about the findings.
- You can expect confidentiality.

Should I have someone with me when staff are talking to me about what happened?
It is recommended that you do choose someone to support you during the discussion. This should be somebody that you are comfortable with, can talk to easily, and who you do not mind hearing your personal information.

Please let us know if you wish somebody to be with you for the discussions. An advocate can be arranged for you if required.

Please remember that when something goes wrong it is distressing for everyone involved, including the members of staff.

Who will speak to me about what happened?
- One or more staff may talk to you, depending on what happened.
- Usually the person leading the conversation will be someone from your healthcare team who knows the most about what happened and will be able to answer any questions you may have.

How should I prepare for a duty of candour conversation?
Before the conversation you may find the following advice helpful:
- Think about what questions and fears/concerns you have in relation to what has happened, your condition, and your ongoing care.
- Write down any questions or concerns you have.
- Think about who you would like to have with you to support you.
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