

# Clinical Handover

## Standard 6



### FACTSHEET



Clinical leaders and senior managers of a health service organisation implement documented systems for effective and structured clinical handover. Clinicians and other members of the workforce use the clinical handover systems.

Clinical handover is the transfer of professional responsibility and accountability for some or all aspects of care for a patient to another person or professional group. It involves the transfer of patient information between individuals or groups and is an important part of clinical care.<sup>1-2</sup>

Clinical handover is practised in a large number of ways in all healthcare settings every day. Breakdown in the transfer of information or in 'communication' has been identified as one of the most important contributing factors in serious adverse events and is a major preventable cause of patient harm.<sup>3</sup> Poor handover of information can also lead to waste of resources. The consequences of poor handover include: unnecessary delays in diagnosis, treatment and care; repeated tests, missed or delayed communication of test results; and incorrect treatment or medication errors.

### Facts and Figures

Approximately 7,068,000 clinical handovers occur annually in Australian hospitals and about 26,200,000 clinical handovers are carried out in community care settings each year.<sup>4</sup>

Clinical handover using face-to-face communication provides more opportunity to clarify information.

Engaging in verbal handover only, compared to verbal handover with some documentation, relies heavily on memory skills and has been classified as high risk.<sup>5</sup>



The use of a standard process for clinical handover has been shown to improve the safety of patient care because critical information is more likely to be transferred and acted upon.<sup>6-7</sup> The information that is transferred between healthcare providers should include all relevant data, be accurate, unambiguous and occur in timely manner.

The aim of this Standard is to ensure there is timely, relevant and structured clinical handover that supports safe patient care.

### In brief, this Standard requires that:

- Health service organisations implement effective clinical handover systems.
- Health service organisations have documented and structured clinical handover processes in place.
- Health service organisations establish mechanisms to include patients and carers in clinical handover processes.

## Resources and Tools

The Commission has the following tools and resources to assist with the implementation of this Standard:

- The OSSIE Guide to Clinical Handover Improvement
- Implementation Toolkit for Clinical Handover Improvement.

## Further Information

A full copy of the Clinical Handover Standard is contained in the *National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards*. It describes the criteria, items and actions required for health services to meet this standard and is available on the Commission's website at [www.safetyandquality.gov.au](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au).

## Clinical handovers can vary in a number of ways, including the:

- **Situation** – at shift change; when patients are transferred within and between hospital/s; during patient admission, referral or discharge.
- **Method** – face-to-face; by telephone; aided by electronic handover tools.
- **Venue** – at the patient's bedside; in a common staff area; at a hospital reception or clinic reception.

## References

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