• Listen to the patient/family and emphasize your commitment to on-going communication. “I am so sorry this happened to you. Let me find out why.

How do I respond to anger from the patient/family?
• “I am sorry you are upset. I’m upset too. Please know that I will do everything I can to understand how and why this happened.”

How should I document this?
• Describe the event and disclosure discussion in the medical record. If you have questions, and are a:
  • Washington University faculty, fellow or staff call 314-362-6956 or page 424-0411
  • BJH resident or staff call 454-7566
  • SLCH resident or staff call 454-4614

For questions about these guidelines, please contact WUSM Patient Safety at 314-747-2933 (more information is available at http://fpp.wustl.edu click on “Disclosure to Patients of Serious Unanticipated Adverse Events”).
**WUSM Guidelines for Disclosure of Adverse Events to Patients**

**KEY PRINCIPLES**

- Patients/family have the right to know the details of significant events that can impact their health.
- Timely, honest and sustained communication with patients and/or their families is an essential component of exceptional health care.

**When should I disclose an adverse event?**

Ask yourself:

1) Did it harm or hurt patient?
2) Did it change care or require intervention?

If the answer to either question is “Yes”, patient/family disclosure is appropriate.

**Who should disclose?**

- The attending MD should speak with the patient or family as soon as the patient. Early contact is important even when all the facts are still unknown.
- Convene or consult the care team first, to discuss the known facts and prepare to advise the patient/family -- a consistent message is important.
- When more than one attending physician is involved, they should consult on the disclosure conversation before speaking to the patient and/or family.
- Every physician should be responsible for disclosing medical errors for which he/she is personally responsible. Physicians should not disclose perceived errors made by other caregivers without involving those caregivers in the disclosure process.

**What should I say?**

- **Acknowledge that an adverse event or medical error occurred.** Describe the facts as you know them and don’t speculate.
- **Express your personal concern.** Be compassionate and say you are sorry.
- **Tell the patient/family what it means for their ongoing medical care.**
- **Let the patient/family know that you will find out what happened and what steps will be taken to prevent similar events in the future.** Before leaving, identify one contact person (attending physician) for future discussions.