physician) for future discussions.

- 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 314-424-0411
  - BJH resident or staff call 314-454-7566
  - SLCH resident or staff call 314-454-4614

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 “Guidelines for Disclosure of Adverse Events to Patients”).
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 required intervention?

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

Who should disclose?

• The attending physician should speak with the patient or family as soon as possible. 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 turn over →