

# Handling Adverse Healthcare Outcomes

Reading time:

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## Have you been involved in an adverse outcome, complaint, claim or investigation?



- 1. Don't panic**  
Becoming involved in an adverse outcome, complaint, claim or investigation is more common than you think and it is likely to happen at some stage of your career. What is important is how well you manage the situation.
- 2. Protect your interests**  
If you receive a writ, letter of demand, advice of a complaint lodged with AHPRA or other complaints authority (eg HCCC), or advice about a hospital investigation into your healthcare, immediately contact your Medical Defence Organisation (MDO). Failure to report incidents, claims, complaints or investigations may prejudice your cover. Remember your MDO is there to help and assist you.
- 3. Be honest and open with your communications**  
If your patient has an unexpected or adverse outcome, you have a code of conduct expectation and responsibility to:
  1. Recognise what has occurred
  2. Act immediately to rectify the problem – so seek assistance and advice
  3. Explain everything to your patient as promptly as possible in relation to what has happened and the anticipated consequences
  4. Acknowledge any patient distress and provide appropriate support.
- 4. Comply**  
With any relevant policies, procedures or reporting requirements that your employer or practice might require. Ensure patients have access to information about the process available to them to make a complaint (eg relevant State health care complaints

commission or the Medical Board).

**5. Complaints**

Should always be taken seriously and addressed professionally however trivial they may seem. Be empathetic and don't be defensive. Acknowledge concerns and agree on the next step.

**6. Express empathy and apologise**

Be sure to apologise by way of an expression of regret, but beware not to admit liability before speaking with your MDO and your employer to protect yourself. In general terms, an expression of regret does not imply fault.

**7. Ensure that medical care continues**

If you do not continue to provide care, assist to facilitate/transfer continuity of care including transfer of medical records.

**8. Act quickly**

Never dwell on receipt of a writ, claim or complaint. Always get the advice of your employer, MDO or mentor who will guide you and assist you through this difficult period.

**9. Cooperate and accept advice**

Cooperate with your MDO representatives and provide your records and all information requested in a timely and professional manner. Be prepared to accept their expert advice, even if you do not agree with it.

**10. Appropriate insurance**

Always make sure your insurance is current and you are appropriately insured for all aspects of your practice. This is also an AHPRA requirement. If in doubt, check with your MDO.

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