

The Importance of Apologies in Healthcare



Reading time:
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During a clinical round an intern supervised a student whilst they inserted a cannula. Despite the student's familiarity with the procedure, the event was problematic. After three failed attempts the intern inserted the cannula successfully on the fourth try. The patient developed a large haematoma at one of the initial sites and this later became infected.

The ward nurse complained to the hospital that she felt the patient was put through unnecessary procedures. She believed that the intern allowed the student too many attempts to insert the cannula that may have led to the patient developing further complications. The intern and the student's clinical school were contacted by the hospital's administration who requested their version of events.

After contacting MIPS

A letter of explanation and a statement for the hospital/education provider/patient is a common request. In this case both the intern and the student were MIPS members, letters were drafted for each, showing empathy and insight. Following their dispatch, no further action was required.

In these cases, the University is responsible for helping the student navigate the complaints, but MIPS is also available to assist if required.

Key messages

- If you are doing any invasive procedure understand and read any protocols that a hospital has. Three failed attempts are usually an indication to hand the patient over to someone else for cannulation. Remember the patient comes first. If a mistake is made the follow up actions can be just as important preventing further mistakes.
- You should promptly notify MIPS of any adverse or unexpected outcomes, complaints, claims or investigations.
- Always provide MIPS with the facts and a full copy of written complaints and consultation notes.

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