

PATIENT HANDOFF

Patient handoff (or sign-out) refers to the specific interaction, communication, and planning required to achieve seamless transitions of care from one clinician to another. Effective and timely sign-outs are essential to maintain high quality medical care, reduce medical errors and redundancy, and prevent loss of information. Hospitalists are involved in the transfer of patient care on a daily basis and can lead institutional initiatives that promote optimal transfer of information between health care providers.

KNOWLEDGE

Hospitalists should be able to:

- Describe key elements involved in signing out a patient.
- Explain important information that should be communicated during patient sign-out, which may include administrative details, updated clinical status, tasks to be completed and relative priority, severity of illness assessment, code status, and contingency planning.
- Explain the components and strategies that are critical for successful communication during sign-outs.
- Explain how the components, strategies and specific information provided at sign-out might vary depending on complexity of the patient, familiarity of provider with the patient and the care environment, and timing of sign-out.
- Explain the strengths and limitations of various sign-out communication strategies and procedures.

SKILLS

Hospitalists should be able to:

- Communicate effectively and efficiently during patient sign-out.
- Demonstrate the use of read back when communicating tasks.
- Utilize the most efficient and effective verbal and written communication modalities.
- Construct patient summaries for oral and written delivery, incorporating the unique characteristics of the patient, provider and timing of the sign-out.
- Evaluate all medications for indication, dosing, and planned duration at the time of sign-out.
- Document updated clinical status, recent and pending test and study results, a complete problem list, and plans for continued care.
- Explain the importance of using “if-then” statements for critical tasks to be completed.
- Anticipate what may go wrong with a patient after a transition in care and communicate this clearly to the receiving clinician.
- Synthesize medical information received from Hospitalists signing out patients into care plans

ATTITUDES

Hospitalists should be able to:

- Inform patients and families in advance of sign-out.
- Recognize the impact of effective and ineffective sign-outs on patient safety.
- Appreciate the value of *real time* interactive dialogue between hospitalists during sign-out.
- Review received sign-out summaries and communications information carefully and request clarification when needed.
- Engage stakeholders in hospital initiatives to continuously assess the quality of sign-outs.
- Lead, coordinate or participate in initiatives to develop and implement new protocols to improve and optimize sign-outs.
- Lead, coordinate or participate in evaluation of new strategies or information systems designed to improve sign-outs.
- Promote availability after sign-outs should questions arise.