



Health Care Consumers' Association
100 Maitland Street
HACKETT ACT 2602
Phone: 02 6230 7800
Fax: 02 6230 7833
Email: adminofficer@hcca.org.au
ABN: 59 698 548 902

HCCA Response to the 'Consultation on Patient Identification Brochure and Poster'

The Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA) of the ACT was formed over 30 years ago to provide a voice for consumers on local health issues and now provides opportunities for health care consumers in the ACT to participate in all levels of health service planning, policy development and decision making.

HCCA welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the development of a new brochure and poster informing consumers about the patient identification procedure. Patient identification is an essential component of quality and safety in health care, which is valued highly by all consumers. It is important for consumers to understand what is being done to ensure that they receive the right care and why steps such as repeatedly asking patients' names are necessary.

The proposed information for the brochure and poster will be very useful for consumers, but we would like to see more of an emphasis placed on the active role that consumers can take in ensuring that they receive the right treatment.

Brochure - Page 2

It is important to acknowledge that patients who are feeling unwell may find it frustrating or tiring to be asked the same questions repeatedly by different staff. We suggest including a sentence on this page such as:

"We understand that this may be frustrating at times and seem strange or impersonal, but it is an important way of ensuring the safety and quality of the care you receive."

After the sentence ending "... you should expect that all staff caring for you will do this", we would like the brochure to explain that this can be a reciprocal process, by stating that,

"You should also feel free to ask staff for their names and to explain their role during your treatment."

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At the end of this section, it would be good to inform consumers of what they can do if they are concerned that this procedure has not been followed correctly, such as contacting a ward manager.

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The first two points on this page are very passive, and are less vital aspects of assisting with the patient identification procedure. The last two points are more important, as they outline

what consumers themselves can do in order to ensure they receive the right treatment and medication.

As the last two points are so important, it would be good to provide some more detail on what these actions can achieve. As mentioned before, being involved in our own care and asking questions is a good way of empowering ourselves to understand what treatment we should be receiving and whether this is being carried out correctly.

Speaking up to staff when we have concerns about the care we are receiving can often be a very daunting task. There have been many past instances where consumers have voiced concerns only to be ignored or chastised for being 'difficult'. It is important not only to encourage consumers to speak up when they have concerns, but also to ensure that a receptive culture is developed among hospital staff.

Consumers also need to be given alternative options in case a member of their care team will not respond to their concerns. They need to know the appropriate person to contact and how that staff member can be identified or located.

Poster

The information presented on this poster is clear and concise. However, like the brochure it does not contain any mention of how consumers can engage with this process. We suggest adding a sentence after "... correct medicine, treatment or operation",

"You can assist us to do this by asking questions about your treatment and speaking up if you have any concerns."

Additional Comments

Consumers would also be interested to know what procedure is followed in cases where a consumer may be unable to speak for themselves; for instance, a patient who is very unwell and having trouble communicating or a Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) consumer when an interpreter is not available. Consider that patient identification is particularly vital in cases where the patient may not be able to clearly understand their treatment or what is going on around them.

CALD consumers have often reported poor communication with hospital staff due to the limited availability of interpreters. Through our consultations with the multicultural community we have learned that in some cases, staff do not bother attempting to communicate with the consumer at all. This is an important quality and safety issue that must be addressed. To assist with this, we strongly recommend that the information in this brochure be translated into a number of different languages to help CALD consumers to engage with the patient identification procedure.

We also recommend that the Health Directorate work with the Aboriginal Liaison Officer to ensure that these resources and the patient identification procedure in general are culturally appropriate for an Indigenous audience.

We are happy to discuss our response further.