The Role of the Open Disclosure Champion

NATIONAL
OPEN DISCLOSURE
PROGRAMME

Open Disclosure Champion Role

As outlined in the HSE Open Disclosure Policy (2025), open disclosure champions are essential for driving a culture of open disclosure. A peer-led approach is critical in both clinical and non-clinical settings to lead and promote our open disclosure policy. Each service (hospital, community, or national service, e.g. the National Ambulance Service, National Screening Service) should have an open disclosure champion.

Clinical leadership is a key element in the management and development of the Irish Health Service. All clinicians and service managers have a role in embedding a culture of openness and transparency in their service by leading, role modelling and supporting their staff.

Internationally it is well recognised that leadership and training are key to the effective implementation of open disclosure policy. The Department of Health's National Open Disclosure Framework outlines that:

- *strong clinical leadership is necessary to build a just culture of open disclosure and reporting within health and social care organisations. Health and Social Care providers should appoint clinical leaders tasked with ensuring open disclosure practice is embedded across the organisation. Clinical leaders should have protected time outside of their clinical duties to undertake this work. (Department of Health, National Open Disclosure Framework 2003, p.49)*[1].

Overall Aim

To ensure people who use our services, their relevant persons, and staff experience compassionate, transparent, and supportive communication following patient safety and notifiable incidents while strengthening organisational learning, trust, and patient safety culture.

The role of an open disclosure champion includes:

- Providing peer support for colleagues and role model best practice;
- Taking a leadership role in open disclosure within their service by championing open disclosure as the right thing to do;
- Signposting staff to resources available to them to guide them through the open disclosure process;
- Supporting a culture of openness and transparency in the service;
- Contributing to clinical governance by liaising with leadership to support their responsibilities for compliance with and implementation of the open disclosure policy, and
- As required, supporting the Open Disclosure Lead in promoting the uptake of mandatory open disclosure training in their service.

[1] https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/patient-safety-legislation-and-advocacy/#national-open-disclosure-framework

Purpose of the Role

- Lead and promote a culture of openness, transparency, and learning through compassionate communication and patient-centred care.
- Support staff with their queries in navigating the open disclosure processes.
- Through this engagement with staff, supporting and advising them on meeting the requirements of the HSE Open Disclosure Policy.

Key Responsibilities

- Promoting awareness and understanding of open disclosure principles and organisational policy.
- Acting as a local point of contact for staff seeking advice on open disclosure processes.
- Encouraging a culture of openness, transparency, learning, and psychological safety.
- Supporting clinical teams in preparing for and participating in open disclosure meetings, where appropriate.
- Advocating for people using our services and family-centred communication following incidents.
- Identifying barriers to effective open disclosure and working with leaders to address them.
- Promoting staff access to training, education, and resources related to open disclosure.
- Sharing learning from patient safety incidents to support quality improvement while maintaining confidentiality.
- Collaborating with patient safety, risk management, quality improvement, and clinical governance teams.
- Encouraging timely documentation and adherence to organisational policies and national standards.
- Participating in awareness campaigns, education sessions, and quality improvement initiatives relating to open disclosure.
- Acting as a role model by demonstrating respectful, honest, and compassionate communication.

Knowledge and Skills

- Understanding of the open disclosure principles, patient safety, and clinical governance.
- Excellent communication, facilitation, and interpersonal skills.
- Ability to support difficult conversations with empathy and professionalism.
- Knowledge of incident management and quality improvement methodologies.
- Strong influencing and relationship-building skills.
- Ability to maintain confidentiality and professional integrity.

Key Relationships

- Clinical staff
- Open Disclosure Lead
- Patients and families
- Designated Persons
- Patient Safety and Quality Team
- Risk Management Team
- Clinical Directors and Nurse/Midwife Managers
- Hospital/Service Leadership
- National Open Disclosure Office
- Patient Advocacy Services

Indicators of successful implementation of the role

- Increased staff awareness and confidence in conducting open disclosure.
- Timely and appropriate completion of open disclosure following patient safety incidents.
- Positive feedback from people who use our services, their relevant person(s), and staff regarding the open disclosure process.
- Increased participation in open disclosure education and training.
- Evidence of learning from incidents being shared and translated into service improvements.
- Improved compliance with organisational and national open disclosure standards.

Models for working

Based on the feedback from our experienced champions, there are models currently in operation which have brought about success to the work of champions across large-scale service providers.
In some organisations champions might find success from operating as a network, where individual champions cover directorates, making themselves available to their colleagues within their own specialities. These individuals then meet on a regular basis to discuss the concerns they have heard and the challenges experienced in the delivery of open disclosure in complex incidents. These discussions might support the identification of trends in incidents, complaints and claims, which champions could share with their colleagues in QPS. Together they might develop a quality improvement plan to manage any unsatisfactory outcomes.

In this way peer-to-peer guidance and support can be offered and learning can be disseminated across the organisation. They might also share approaches for developing and enhancing the culture of open

disclosure in their area of work and dates for when training is planned, so these opportunities are maximised for the whole service.

Alternatively, champions might achieve success in their responsibilities by communicating with QPS representatives and senior leaders across the directorates/the organisation on the challenges to the delivery of open disclosure. They might then work with leaders to promote training and support complex open disclosure cases. A particular focus of this work, requiring collaborative effort, is to embed a culture of openness, transparency and honesty in communications with patients, their relevant persons and amongst staff.

Resources to support Open Disclosure Champions and the promotion of open disclosure

- Open Disclosure Policy Implementation Checklist
- Incident Management Framework and Open Disclosure Audit Tool

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