



A Picture Book Guide to

Patient First

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Informed Consent

When it comes to having an operation or test, especially one that may involve risk, you are required to give what is called 'Informed Consent'. In other words, you will need to agree to the procedure or treatment suggested for your medical condition.



Informed Consent in health care means that you are given accurate information in a way you can understand so you can make the right decision for you.

The doctor or health professional will discuss your treatment options with you.

Your job is to ask questions if there is anything you don't understand.

The doctor or health professional gets your consent or not and records what is agreed to.

In other words, you decide whether to undergo the procedure or treatment for your condition.

Your medical team has the expertise and knowledge to suggest the best treatment however *THE TREATMENT YOU RECEIVE IS YOUR CHOICE* and is a choice you must agree to before your treatment can proceed.

Before you give your informed consent, your doctor or health professional has to tell you or your parent/guardian the risks and benefits of the treatment options being discussed.



At this point you have the right to ask questions such as:



- This discussion may explore different types of surgery, choice of medical procedures or what will happen if you don't do anything at all
- You have the right to a second opinion and to ask questions
- Once you are informed about the possible risks and benefits you can judge which outcomes you are willing to accept as part of your decision

FOR EXAMPLE:



- It is also important for you to think about the likelihood of success and the possible complications of your treatment options in making your decision



FOR EXAMPLE:



Health professionals have to tell you about your treatment, answer your questions and gain your consent before treatment begins.



Making the right **decisions for you**

Whilst your health professional can advise you on treatment options, only you know about such things as your:

LIFESTYLE

You like to:

- Play sport
- Walk the dog
- Be independent



PERSONAL PREFERENCES AND NEEDS

You might need to make some dietary changes.



WORK DEMANDS

Depending on the kind of work you do you might need to think about possibly being off work for weeks.

FAMILY DEMANDS

- You might need to consider:
- An ageing family member
 - Children
 - Your partner

In order to arrive at the best decision regarding your treatment, you will need to factor in these things as well as exploring:

TREATMENT OPTIONS

Most conditions will have more than one treatment option; each with different risks and expected outcomes.



RISKS AND BENEFITS

You need to weigh up the risks and benefits depending on your situation.

It may be helpful for you to list the things you need to consider in order to make an informed decision.



Understanding **your risk**

Any medical procedure involves risks which must be weighed against the likely benefits of the treatment. It is vital that you fully discuss the risks with your health professional to ensure that you are fully informed before giving your consent to proceed.

- Remember the risks and benefits can never be guaranteed
- A risk is important if it influences your decision e.g. think about family/work responsibilities
- It is law that you be told about probable, frequent or serious risks and any health complications
- Ask questions if you are not sure



To help you gain a clearer picture of the risks and benefits of your procedure, your doctor may use a visual aid called the Paling Palette (see overleaf) to explain.



It is important that you take the time to understand the information and are comfortable with your decision.

Ask your doctor to explain how many people (out of a thousand) have positive or negative results from the procedure you are considering using the Paling Palette.

Understanding the risks of my procedure

When your doctor is explaining the risks of the procedure to you, fill in the following page in your own words. Ask the doctor to fill in the relevant number of figures on the Paling Palette of 1,000 people provided overleaf, and to explain the possible positive and negative outcomes and any significant risks you may have as a patient.

My doctor has informed me that my condition is called: _____

The procedure I will be having is called: _____

I understand that this will involve: _____

My doctor has explained to me that the benefits and positive and possible negative outcomes of me having this procedure are:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

My doctor has explained to me that the possible risks of this procedure are:

1. _____

2. _____

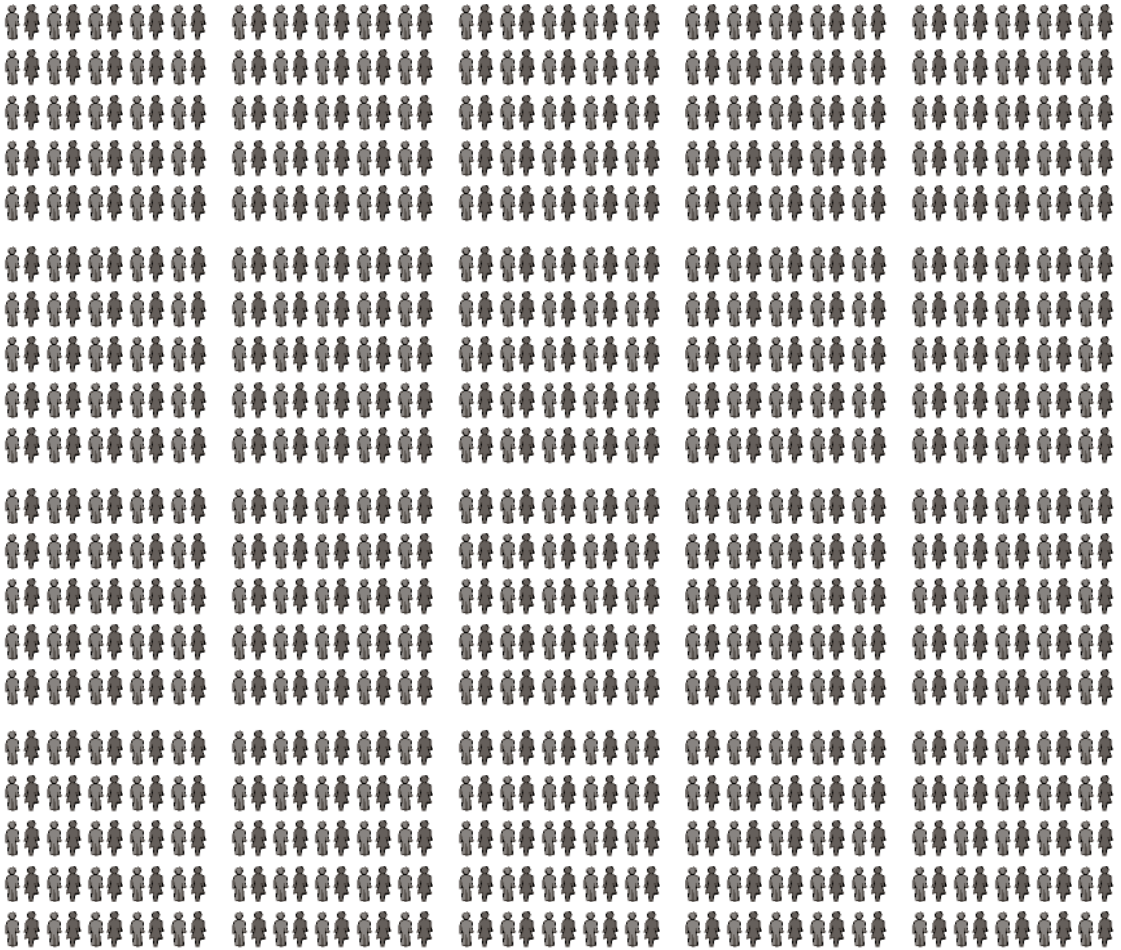
3. _____

4. _____

I understand that the risk of me experiencing an adverse event during the procedure is _____ percent. When using a Paling Palette the risk can be calculated as _____ in 1,000.

Ask your doctor to fill in the relevant number of figures on the Paling Palette of 1,000 provided overleaf. Your doctor may wish to use a different colour pen to highlight each risk on the palette (overleaf).

Note to the Doctor: When explaining the risks to the patient, translate the percentage risk into a rate per 1,000 then fill in the relevant number of figures below, explaining the positive and negative outcomes simultaneously and the significance of any risks for the patient.



The Paling Palette of 1,000 people. Copyright 2001 John Paling & Co. For licensing rights, contact www.riskcomm.com

Your Rights and Responsibilities

You have rights and responsibilities as a patient/consumer.

As a patient you have the right to:

- Receive free public hospital services as a public patient
- Emergency department treatment and you will be treated according to how sick you are and told approximately how long you will have to wait
- Planned surgery and you will be classified according to how sick you are and told approximately how long you will have to wait
- Access to services such as interpreters
- Have a carer with you
- Be treated with respect and dignity
- Be given a clear explanation of your treatment and have your questions answered
- Agree or refuse to participate in student training or medical research
- Say yes or no to treatment
- Seek a second opinion and discuss options with family or friends
- Be informed of ongoing health care requirements prior to leaving hospital
- Confidentiality of your medical records
- Complain about or compliment your treatment and care and to be told how to make a complaint
- Apply to get a copy of your medical records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) 1992

SO, WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS?



If you choose to be treated as a private patient in a public hospital you will be charged for the cost of medical services, accommodation and other related costs.

Costs and rebates should be discussed prior to commencement of treatment.



It is your responsibility to:

- Provide medical staff with your medical history. Family and friends could help with this
- Report medicines you are using including over-the-counter, vitamins and herbal medicines
- Tell health staff about changes in your condition or problems with treatment
- Be respectful of staff. Aggressive or violent behaviour will lead to withdrawal of treatment
- Follow treatment instructions or tell staff if you can't or don't wish to do so
- Say if you don't want students involved in your care
- Keep appointments or let staff know in advance if you cannot attend the appointment



WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR HEALTH CARE!



Health care professionals have a responsibility to:

- Be respectful and take account of your wishes
- Listen attentively
- Address your fears by providing information
- Speak in ways you can understand
- Answer your questions honestly
- Inform and educate you about your illness including:

Treatment options

- risks and benefits of options
- likelihood of success, risks or complications
- what you can expect from treatment and check to see that you understand
- gain your consent for treatment
- ask if you want to participate in any research during your treatment
- provide adequate information and time for you to make an informed decision about your treatment
- tell you how urgent your case is and where you are in the treatment queue



YOU HAVEN'T MENTIONED THE HEALTH CARE PROVIDER'S RIGHTS!



SIMPLE, REALLY- R-E-S-P-E-C-T!



AND IF STAFF FEEL THREATENED THEY CAN WITHDRAW TREATMENT!



Managing medications **safely at home**

Medication mistakes can happen in hospital or at home when medicines are prescribed, given or taken incorrectly.

Accidents can occur when :

- Medicines have the same or similar packaging



- A dose is missed or doubled or there is a misunderstanding as to instructions on how to take medicines

- Medicines clash with each other



- Your health condition may increase the likelihood of side effects from your medication

Make sure you tell your health professional about all your health problems and the medicines you are taking for them.

To manage your medicines safely, the following steps should be taken:

- Keep a list of all medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medicines, vitamins and herbal medicines



- Ask your doctor for information on:
 - what your medicine is for
 - when you should take this medicine
 - side effects to look for
 - whether this medicine can safely mix with your other medicines

Managing medications in hospital

- Keep track of medicines you receive in hospital and note the time and dosage. Speak to staff about differences in dosage, if you have been refused medication or if it has been delayed
- Ask family or friends to help with this



- If there is a problem ask questions. Sometimes things can go wrong in hospitals
- Tell staff straight away if you are feeling unwell after taking medicine

- Make sure you understand all instructions about your ongoing medicines before you leave hospital, including whether to continue medicines you were taking prior to hospitalisation



- Buy a dosage box (available at pharmacies and supermarkets)

- Get your medicine from the same pharmacy every time so it can be monitored by your pharmacist



For further reference, ask your doctor for written information known as *Consumer Medications Information (CMI)* or visit the National Prescribing Service at www.nps.org.au/consumers

You will find a sample Patient Medication Record Form below

Always write down the medications that you are taking so that in an emergency health care staff can access the information quickly. You will find a sample Patient Medication Record Form below.

Medication	Strength	What was it prescribed for?	How much do I use?	Date started
Example: Paracetamol	500mg tablets	Arthritis pain in knee	2 tablets, 4 times/day	

Patient Name: _____

I should review my medications on: _____

Patient medication **record form**

When you visit your general practitioner, pharmacist or go into hospital, always take your Patient Medication Record Form with you. See example on page 14.

If you are scheduled to go into hospital, take all of your medications with you (unless the hospital asks you not to). This will help your doctor and other health practitioners to provide you with the correct medications and enable them to update your medications, if it is required.

Always write down the medications that you are taking so that in an emergency health care staff can access the information quickly.

The National Prescribing Service recommends that you list all medication you are currently taking including any that:

- you take on prescription;
- have been recommended by your pharmacist;
- you have received whilst in hospital; and/or
- you have purchased over-the-counter.

Ask your general practitioner or pharmacist about your medication and for information that you can take home and read in your own time.

You can also obtain information by phoning the National Prescribing Service Medicines Line on **1300 888 763** (Monday to Friday 9.00 am to 6.00pm (EST)) or by visiting the 'Consumers' page of the National Prescribing Service website at: **www.nps.org.au/consumers**

Always tell your Health Professional:

- The health problem that is being treated
- Other health problems
- If you are pregnant, breastfeeding or plan to become pregnant whilst on medication
- Other medicines you are taking including over-the-counter or herbal medicines or vitamins
- Any allergic reactions to medicines that have made you feel unwell in the past
- Risk factors such as smoking, alcohol or recreational drugs
- Your preferences e.g. tablets, capsules or liquid
- You can always ask if there is a cheaper brand of the medicine available



Keeping track of your medications is vitally important. If you are too unwell to do so yourself, ask a family member or friend to help you.

If you have more questions, talk to your doctor or pharmacist or speak to a pharmacist at:

**National Prescribing Service Medicines Hotline 1300 888 763
Monday to Friday 9.00am to 6.00pm (EST) Cost of local call**

Surgery on the wrong patient or the wrong site (place on your body) rarely happens but the outcome can be severe.

You can help us by the following safety checks:

- **Ask to see your consent form**

Read the form carefully before your procedure or surgery

- **Check your consent form**

Check the form before taking any medication



Make sure that the surgery or procedure is what you consented to when you signed it. Should there be an error obtain a new consent form.



- **Check your details.**

Check your full name, date of birth, the type of procedure and that the side and place on your body where the procedure you are about to undergo is correct

Remind staff to cross-check your procedure with your identification band, medical record and consent form

- **Check that the correct site/side is clearly marked**

You should ensure that your clinician has marked the site and side of the procedure on your skin with a water-resistant pen



Before surgery begins, the clinical team will make a final check to verify correct patient, type of procedure and confirm the site.

Preventing falls **in hospital**

Falls can happen more easily when you are unwell as a result of poor balance, low blood pressure, some medications, physical inactivity, unfamiliar places, poor eyesight and unsafe footwear.

To lower the chance of falls when in hospital you should:

- Wear comfortable clothing and footwear



- Take your time getting up from a seated position or lying down and let staff know if you feel unwell or unsteady on your feet, particularly when using the toilet

- Bring your walking aids with you. If staff recommend assistance or supervision when walking, ask and wait for assistance



- Bring your glasses with you and wear the correct pair for walking. Take special care if using multi-focal lenses

- Familiarise yourself with your hospital room, furniture and bathroom location. Tell staff of any clutter or spills



- Drink plenty of fluids

Falls can also happen at home or when you are out and about. Prevent falls with the following simple steps:

Professional Assessment

Before you leave hospital, ask your health professional to assess your risk of a fall and seek their advice if you are at risk.

Be sure to tell your health professional what your home is like. If you think you need modifications at home, you might be eligible for government assistance for home modifications. Ask about this.



Keep active

Walking 30 minutes a day will improve your balance and your fitness, even if you do it in ten minute lots.

Walk tall

Good posture and the way you walk can prevent falls. Hold your head up high.



Vision

Have annual eye checks and give yourself time to adjust to new glasses, especially bi-focals.

Outdoors

Outdoor steps should be well lit and have sturdy handrails. Check and repair uneven paths, decking or driveways. Keep pathways clear.



Out and about

Report any hazards in your community such as missing handrails, uneven paths, slippery surfaces or poor lighting.

Report any slip hazards to councils or shopping centre or store managers.

At home

- Ensure your home is well lit, especially stairs or steps



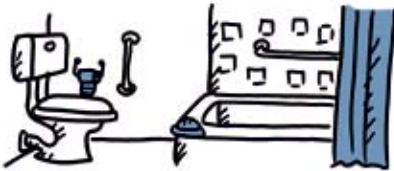
- Ensure walkways are free of obstructions

- Remove rugs that can slide or secure them



- Fit bathroom and kitchen with non-slip surfaces and use non-slip mats

- Clean up spills immediately



- Install handrails by stairs or steps and in bathroom and toilets

- Install a night light or a lamp that is easily reached if you need to get up frequently during the night or keep a torch nearby



- Keep frequently used items within easy reach to avoid using a stepladder or chair

- Be aware of pets when moving around the house



Further help

Medication

- Make sure you get your medicines regularly reviewed
- Make sure you understand the effects of your medicine



Manage your condition

Have regular check-ups with your doctor to discuss concerns, prevent complications and reduce possible side effects.

Make sure you tell the doctor all the medicines you are taking including vitamins and herbal medicines.

Improve your balance

Do 30 minutes of gentle exercise each day to improve your balance.



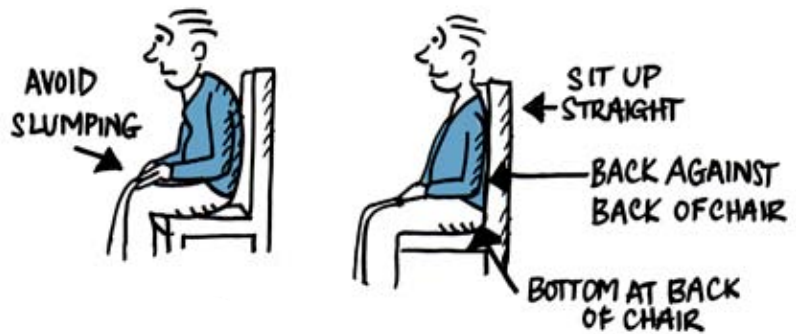
Preventing pressure ulcers

A pressure ulcer is a sore, break or blister of the skin caused by constant unrelieved pressure on an area of the body over a long period.

Pressure ulcers can be very painful and take a long time to heal and may reduce mobility. Though movement may be difficult, a few simple actions can save a lot of pain.

To prevent pressure ulcers you should:

- Adopt good posture when sitting



- Change your body position at least every 1-2 hours if in bed or every 15 minutes to one hour if seated. If you cannot move yourself, ask for assistance

- Use special equipment such as specialised mattresses or heel elevators



- Watch for early signs:
 - Constant redness
 - Broken or blistered skin
 - Localised pain
 - Tingling
 - Numbness



If you notice any symptoms, advise your doctor or nurse immediately.

If you cannot check all of your body, ask a nurse, family member or friend to check regularly for you.

- Bathe or wash with warm water and a mild, non-drying cleanser



- Use moisturising lotion to prevent dryness; however, avoid vigorous rubbing as this may damage underlying tissue

- Keep your skin clean and dry at all times. If you use an incontinence device, change it regularly to avoid skin irritation



- Apply a special dressing to any existing or potential pressure area to protect the site



Who is at risk from pressure ulcers?

Anyone can get pressure ulcers but you are at greater risk if you are frail, elderly or if you have:

Been confined to a bed or chair



Poor diet or fluid intake

Poor control of bladder or bowel



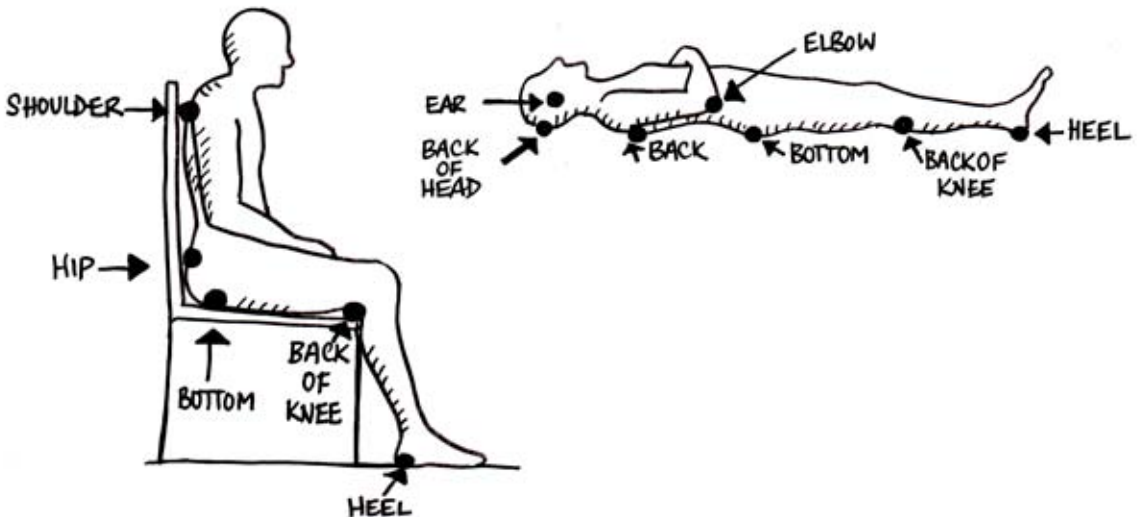
Diabetes, poor circulation, history of smoking



Reduced mental awareness due to illness, medications or anaesthetics

Where do pressure ulcers occur?

Pressure ulcers can occur anywhere on the body but are more likely to appear on the bony areas where there is little padding, as shown below:



Key point to remember:

Pressure ulcers, or 'bed sores' can be very painful and take a long time to heal. The depth of skin damage can vary from shallow to very deep. It is worth making the effort to prevent them.

- Unrelieved, constant pressure is the main cause but other causes can be:
 - Friction
 - 'Shearing' (dragging the skin when sliding down in the bed)
 - Too much exposure to moisture

- On admission to hospital, you will be assessed for risk of pressure ulcers and a plan will be arranged to reduce the risk. If your condition changes, ask for a reassessment

- In hospital or at home, remember to:
 - Change your body position frequently
 - Inspect your skin for early warning signs



- Do not vigorously massage or rub the skin

- If wearing bandages or surgical stockings, inform your nurse or doctor if they are chafing or causing discomfort



Avoiding **infection**

The last thing you want when you are already feeling unwell is an infection and even when you are well, colds, flu and other infections are best avoided.

Here are some ways to minimise your risk of infection:

- If you are preparing for surgery DO NOT shave the area



- If you are a smoker try to quit at least 30 days before your admission or at least cut down. This is especially important if you are having surgery

- If you have an open wound, carefully follow your health practitioner's instructions on treatment and care



- Avoid close contact with people who have an infectious condition and ask people not to visit if they are ill. If you are sick stay away from other patients

- Ask if those who treat you have washed their hands before touching you



At home, avoid infection by:

- Washing your hands regularly with warm water and soap or use an alcohol-based gel (available from pharmacies)



Wash vigorously for at least 15 seconds especially after you have:



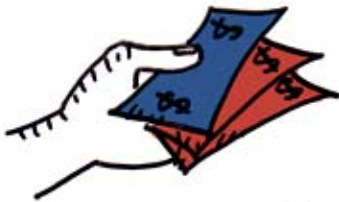
Used the bathroom



Taken out the rubbish



Changed a nappy



Handled money



Played with a pet

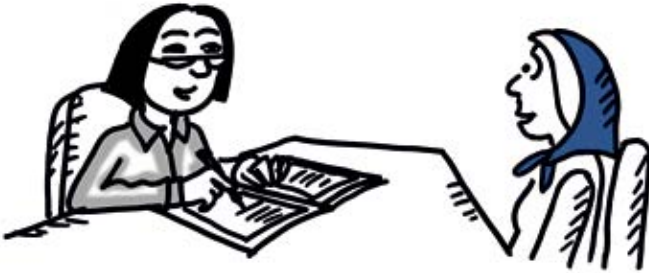
- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze, then wash your hands



What happens to your **health information?**

It is important for your health service provider to have your health records for the following reasons:

- Your information can be accessed quickly in case of an emergency



- A new physician can have access to your previous health history

- You live in a rural area where your health information may be accessed through Telehealth



Telehealth enables patients in rural and remote WA to talk to and see their health professional on a TV screen at their local health service. The health professional can see and hear the patient as well.

- Your previous records may need to be shared electronically if you are being treated at another hospital (paper records remain at the original hospital)



- When you are a hospital patient in Western Australia, some personal information is recorded, coded and sent to the WA Health Department

In addition, the WA Health Department is authorised to access and retain certain information by law in the following cases:

- A diagnosis of cancer
- A diagnosis of mental illness
- Birth details
- A diagnosis of a notifiable communicable disease
- Assisted reproductive procedures



Information accessed by the Department of Health is coded to protect your personal information.



CAN I SEE MY OWN MEDICAL RECORDS?



The Department of Health and health care professionals are legally and ethically obliged to keep your personal information confidential.

Health information is used for research, planning and service improvement reports.

For more information contact:

**Health Consumers Council Inc. WA
(08) 9221 3422 or info@hconc.org.au
Freecall 1800 620 780**

You have a right to access your public hospital records and:

- Know what information is held about you
- Access that information subject to some exceptions, for example, if it is unhelpful to your recovery or is information provided for serious clinical incidents
- Request that amendments are made to any incorrect information

It often takes time to access your records from a public hospital – about 40 days.



For more information:
[www.health.wa.gov.au/medical records/](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/medical-records/).
Check out www.hconc.org.au for a model letter under Our Services/Advocacy.

You may also request access to information under the *Freedom of information (FOI) Act 1992*.

Forward your written application directly to the hospital in which you were treated.



If you have difficulty accessing your information from the hospital, contact the Freedom of Information Co-ordinator at the Department of Health on (08) 9222 6412

**or the Information Commissioner on (08) 9220 7888
or Freecall 1800 621 244 or www.foi.wa.gov.au**

For further information or assistance contact the Health Consumers Council of WA (08) 9221 3422 or if outside the metropolitan area Freecall 1800 620 780.

Complaining to improve patient safety

Health care is complex and sometimes things go wrong.

If you want to complain or tell the people responsible you have suffered harm and don't want the mistake to happen to anyone else, you have to complain to the right people. Your complaint is important as it tells health organisations what they need to change to stop harming patients.

If you don't complain to the right place, your important information will go to the wrong people and get ignored or lost in the health system.

Choose where to complain to from the list of organisations below, if your report or comment relates to:

Medications and medical devices

In medical language these are called 'therapeutic goods'. The Australia-wide government agency responsible for problems with medications and 'medical devices' (eg artificial hip/knees or pacemakers) is the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). The TGA has an on-line reporting service for both patients and health professionals to report problems at: www.tga.gov.au

Alternatively, phone **1300 134 237** for problems with medicines or phone **1800 809 361** for problems with devices.



Health care professionals

If you are not happy with how you have been treated by a health professional outside a hospital, you can contact Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (APHRA). www.aphra.gov.au or Freecall **1300 419 495**.



Care, treatment or service in a hospital

You can make a comment or complaint directly through any staff member on the ward or through the Complaints Manager at your hospital.

If you are not happy with what happened with your complaint to a hospital you can make a complaint to Health and Disability Services Complaints Office (HaDSCO) in WA which is an independent agency established to deal with complaints about health and disability services.

**You need to make your complaint within two years of the event occurring. HaDSCO can be contacted by phoning: (08) 9323 0600
Freecall: 1800 813 583 (for country residents)
or by visiting: www.hadsko.wa.gov.au**



If you would like free advice or help to make a complaint or comment you can contact:

Health Consumers' Council of WA
Ph: (08) 9221 3422, or Freecall 1800 620 780,
if you live outside the metropolitan area.

Comments, complaints **and feedback**

Comments

Telling the hospital/health service how you experienced their service helps health providers to understand the service from a patient's point of view.

Complaints

- You have the right to complain
- Your complaint must be in writing
- You should hear back within 5 working days that your complaint has been received
- If you have not heard, you can call the Customer Service/Patient Liaison officer at the hospital where you were treated
- If you want help writing your letter, contact Health Consumers' Council on (08) 9221 3422 or info@hconc.org.au

By listening to the patient, the hospital and staff can improve patient care and patient safety for everyone.

Positive Feedback

If you have received excellent care, please let the hospital know!

A copy of the Western Australian Public Patients' Hospital Charter is available from your hospital, the Department of Health (www.health.wa.gov.au) or the Health Consumers' Council of WA (www.hconc.org.au)



Health Consumers' Council

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