

What is a hand-off?

A hand-off is a transfer and acceptance of patient care responsibility achieved through effective communication. It is a real-time process of passing patient-specific information from one caregiver to another or from one team of caregivers to another for the purpose of ensuring the continuity and safety of the patient's care.



When conducting a hand-off, include all team members and, if appropriate, the patient and family. This time can be used to consult, discuss, and ask and answer questions. Remember not to rely only on patients or family members to communicate vital information on their own to receivers.

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When conducting hand-offs or sign-outs, do them face to face in a designated location that is free from non-emergency interruptions, such as a "zone of silence."

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Make sure the receiver gets the following minimum information:

- Sender contact information
- Illness assessment, including severity
- Patient summary, including events leading up to illness or admission, hospital course, ongoing assessment, and plan of care
- To-do action list
- Contingency plans
- Allergy list
- Code status
- Medication list
- Dated laboratory tests
- Dated vital signs

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If information is coming from many sources, combine and communicate it all at one time, rather than communicating the information separately.

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What is the standard?

Provision of Care standard PC.02.02.01, element of performance (EP) 2: The organization's process for hand-off communication provides for the opportunity for discussion between the giver and receiver of patient information.

Note: Such information may include the patient's condition, care, treatment, medications, services, and any recent or anticipated changes to any of these.



Don't rely solely on electronic or paper communications to hand-off the patient. If face-to-face communication is not possible, communicate by telephone or video conference. This allows the time and opportunity to ask questions.

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Standardize tools and methods used to communicate to receivers. These can be forms, templates, checklists, protocols, and mnemonics, such as I-PASS (stands for Illness severity, Patient summary, Action list, Situation awareness and contingency plans, and Synthesis by receiver).

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Determine the critical information that needs to be communicated face to face and in writing. Cover everything needed to safely care for the patient in a timely fashion.

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Use electronic health records (EHRs) and other technologies (such as apps, patient portals, telehealth) to enhance hand-offs between senders and receivers — don't rely on them on their own.

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8 Tips for High-quality Hand-offs

All caregivers can make high-quality hand-offs. Here's how.