

Recognising and Responding to Clinical Deterioration in Acute Health Care

Standard 9



FACTSHEET



Health service organisations establish and maintain systems for recognising and responding to clinical deterioration. Clinicians and other members of the workforce use the recognition and response systems.

Recognising that a patient's condition is deteriorating and responding to their needs in an appropriate and timely way is an essential component of safe and high quality care.

Serious adverse events such as unexpected death and cardiac arrest often follow observable deterioration in the patient's condition.¹ Early identification of deterioration, followed by prompt and effective action, can minimise the occurrence of these events, and may improve outcomes and lessen the level of intervention required to stabilise patients whose condition deteriorates.²

There is evidence that the warning signs of clinical deterioration are not always identified or acted on appropriately.³ The organisation and workforce factors that contribute to a failure to recognise and respond to a deteriorating patient are complex and overlapping. Systems to recognise deterioration early and respond to it appropriately need to deal with all of these factors, and need to apply across a healthcare facility.

The aim of this Standard is to ensure a patient's deterioration is recognised promptly, and appropriate action is taken. The Standard applies to all patients in acute healthcare facilities including adults, adolescents, children and babies, and to all types of patients including medical, surgical, maternity and mental health patients. Acute healthcare facilities range from large tertiary referral centres, to small district and community hospitals. This Standard does not apply to deterioration of a patient's mental state.

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In brief, this Standard requires that:

- Health services use organisation-wide systems consistent with the National Consensus Statement to support and promote recognition of, and response to, patients whose condition deteriorates in an acute health care facility.
- Patients whose condition is deteriorating are recognised and appropriate action is taken to escalate care.
- Appropriate and timely care is provided to patients whose condition is deteriorating.
- Patients, families and carers are informed of recognition and response systems and can contribute to the processes of escalating care.

- A Guide to Support Implementation of the National Consensus Statement: Essential Elements for Recognising and Responding to Clinical Deterioration (available 2012).
- Six quick-start guides to support implementation of the National Consensus Statement and the Recognising and Responding to Clinical Deterioration in Acute Health Care Standard (available 2012).

Factors that contribute to failure to recognise and respond to deteriorating patients include:⁴⁻⁶

- not monitoring physiological observations consistently or not understanding observed changes in physiological observations
- lack of knowledge of signs and symptoms that could signal deterioration
- lack of formal systems for responding to deterioration
- lack of skills to manage patients who are deteriorating
- failure to communicate clinical concerns, including in handover situations.

Further Information

A full copy of the Recognising and Responding to Clinical Deterioration in Acute Health Care Standard is contained in the *National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards*. It describes the criteria, items and actions required for health services to meet this Standard and is available on the Commission's website at www.safetyandquality.gov.au.

References

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3. MERIT Study Investigators. Introduction of the medical emergency team (MET) system: A cluster-randomised controlled trial. *Lancet* 2005;365:2091-2097.
4. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. National Consensus Statement: Essential Elements for Recognising and Responding to Clinical Deterioration. Sydney. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (ACSQHC).
5. Cioffi J, Salter C, Wilkes L, Vonu-Boriceanu O, Scott J. Clinicians' responses to abnormal vital signs in an emergency department. *Australian Critical Care* 2006;19(2):66-72.
6. Endacott R, Kidd T, Chaboyer W, Edington J. Recognition and communication of patient deterioration in a regional hospital: A multi-methods study. *Australian Critical Care* 2007;20:100-105.
7. McQuillan P, Pilkington S, Allan A, Taylor B, Short A, Morgan G, et al. Confidential inquiry into quality of care before admission to intensive care. *British Medical Journal* 1998;316:1853-1858.

Resources and Tools

The Commission has the following tools and resources to assist with the implementation of this Standard:

- National Consensus Statement: Essential Elements for Recognising and Responding to Clinical Deterioration.
- Observation and response charts designed according to human factors principles.

Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care

Level 7, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW 2010
GPO Box 5480, Sydney NSW 2001
Phone: (02) 9126 3600
Fax: (02) 9126 3613
Email: mail@safetyandquality.gov.au
www.safetyandquality.gov.au