Health PEI

SAFER PRACTICE NOTICE

Documentation of Next of Kin and Substitute Decision Maker October 2026

Issue:

A recent patient safety incident identified that a patient's Next of Kin (NOK) and Substitute Decision Maker (SDM) information was either missing, incomplete, or not readily identifiable within the medical record. This created significant challenges in timely communication, consent discussions, and decision-making during patient care.

Failure to accurately document and maintain NOK and SDM information may result in:

- Delays in obtaining informed consent for treatment.
- Challenges communicating significant changes in a patient's condition.
- Difficulty identifying the appropriate decision-maker when the patient lacks capacity.
- Potential legal, ethical, and patient safety concerns.
- Delays in discharge planning and care coordination.

Reminders:

All staff involved in patient registration, admission, assessment, and ongoing care are reminded to:

- Confirm and document the patient's Next of Kin and Substitute Decision Maker information at the earliest opportunity.
- Verify contact information for NOK and SDM is current and accurate.
- Update the medical record whenever changes are identified.
- Escalate situations where no NOK or SDM information is available to the most responsible provider and care team.
- Ensure documentation is entered into the health record and is easily accessible to all members of the care team.
- Reconfirm NOK and SDM information during admissions, transfers of care, and significant changes in patient status.

Take Aways:

Accurate identification and documentation of a patient's NOK and SDM are critical components of safe, person-centered care. Proactive verification helps ensure timely communication, supports informed decision-making, and reduces the risk of delays during urgent or unexpected clinical situations.

For more information on this Safer Practice Notice, please contact:

Susan Chappell
Quality and Patient Safety Consultant
Quality and Patient Safety Division
sachappell@ihis.org

Julie Fitzpatrick- Hopkin
Social Work Manager
Social Work Department
jfitzpatick-hopkin@ihis.org

Safer Practice Notices are issued by the Health PEI Quality and Patient Safety Division to communicate recommended changes as a result of events that have been reported and investigated through the Provincial Safety Management System (PSMS).

Safer Practice Notices can be found at: https://src.healthpei.ca/safer-practice-notices