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## **Caring Together: standard principles for handover to improve patient care**

NSW Minister for Health, Carmel Tebbutt, has today launched new guidelines for clinical handover to ensure greater patient safety in NSW hospitals.

“The ‘Key Principles for Safe and Effective Handover’ have been developed as part of the NSW Government’s *Caring Together: A Health Action Plan for NSW*, which is the response to the Garling Report, to create standardised and quality handover procedures in NSW,” Ms Tebbutt said.

“Millions of occasions of clinical handover occur every year in NSW. Clinical handover refers to the exchange of patient information not just at the change of shifts but when patients are transferred to another ward, transferred for a test or appointment, transferred to another hospital or transferred from hospitals to GPs or community care.

“Each time clinical information is handed over there is an associated risk for the patient. With subsequent handovers, the magnitude of risk and potential adverse outcomes multiplies.”

“Inadequate communication of key information, at the time of transfer of care, is often a contributing factor to incidents. In fact, the World Health Organisation has ranked improved communication during clinical handover as one of the top five actions needed to improve patient safety.”

Ms Tebbutt said the Garling Inquiry recommended NSW Health introduce a mandatory shift handover policy, which includes, as a minimum a requirement, that part of the handover is at the patient’s bedside, sufficient time is allocated for handover, specific information is to be conveyed during handover and that a written or electronic record be made of the handover.

“Following extensive reviews of local, national and international handover procedures, the new key principles have been developed to be applicable to all types of clinical handover. They will provide standardisation, but promote flexibility at the local level.

“At all stages of a patient journey someone must have accountability for the patient and this is ensured through effective handover.

“The key principles will assist every clinician to better understand their roles and responsibilities during a clinical handover and ensure clinical handover at the change of shifts is a valued and essential part of the working day by setting an agreed time and place, preferably by the patient’s bedside.

Ms Tebbutt said standardisation of handover will ensure effective, concise and complete communication in all clinical situations and facilitate care delivery.

