**MANAGEMENT OF OPEN DISCLOSURE WHILST USING PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)**

Physical distancing and the requirement for staff to wear PPE create communication challenges for patients and healthcare providers. Patients and their families may struggle to hear what is being said and to see who they are talking to. Staff are concerned that their humanity may be hidden behind the PPE and their inability to provide physical comfort such as holding a patient’s hand. The requirement to wear PPE should not prevent or delay open disclosure happening. The role of the designated person (key contact person) will be critical in relation to liaising with the patient/relevant person in supporting them in preparing for the meeting.

**Key Points**

* The meeting must be conducted in a safe environment. Appropriate PPE must be made available and used by all participants in the meeting. The Infection Prevention and Control Department must be contacted to advise on the appropriate level of PPE and to ensure that all infection prevention and control measures are being taken to protect the patient, their relevant person and staff present in the meeting.
* It is important to be cognisant of the fact that when PPE is worn by all attendees it can lead to difficulties in verbal communications, affect the quality of interpersonal relationships and interactions between staff, patients/family members.

It is helpful to acknowledge this at the beginning of the meeting and to concentrate on using appropriate words while speaking slowly and clearly.

The tone of voice is important to demonstrate a caring approach while maintaining good eye to eye contact. Provide information in small chunks and establish understanding throughout the communication process while demonstrating empathy and compassion.

Be particularly mindful if the patient and/or relevant person have any difficulty hearing as they cannot see your facial expression or lip movement.

**Prior to the Meeting**

* Ensure that the venue for the meeting is a suitable size to allow for physical distancing.
* Ensure that all infection control measures are in place, e.g. hand gel, face masks, bins, tissues/wipes.
* The designated person must ensure that the patient/relevant person are aware of infection control requirements including physical distancing, the need to avoid physical contact, the need for hand hygiene and the requirement to wear appropriate PPE which will be provided for them. The designated person will arrange a meet and greet area to provide and don PPE and then accompany the patient/relevant person to the meeting room.
* The number of persons attending these meetings must be kept to a minimum.

**At the Meeting**

* Acknowledge the PPE: An example of introduction could be “*I know we appear a bit intimidating dressed in all this gear, but I do really want to speak to you and hope that we will be able to have a full conversation*”.
* Clearly outline the names and roles of staff present as this may not be clear.
* Staff should face the patient/relevant person and make sure the patient/relevant person is looking at them, if possible, before speaking.
* Staff should look directly at the patient/relevant person and make good eye contact.
* Consider seating arrangements to ensure good lighting (avoid sitting directly in front of a window or light).
* Speak slowly in a natural way and be responsive in the conversation.
* Support understanding by intentionally using gestures and body language to communicate information. Even though the patient/relevant person may not be able to directly see your face and some of your gestures, bear in mind that your non-verbal communication will be transmitted and will be picked up. This is particularly important when apologising / expressing regret.
* Allow the patient a bit more time to pick up on your non-verbal communication as it is disguised by the PPE.
* Visual aids may be used to assist the communication process.
* Give the patient/relevant person the opportunity to tell their story and to ask any questions. Answer questions honestly and factually.
* The information provided at the meeting will be managed in line with the provisions of the HSE open disclosure policy.

**After the Meeting**

* The designated person will assist the patient/relevant person with decontamination and removal of PPE, as appropriate.
* A follow up call by the designated person after the meeting will be offered and a date and time agreed for the call.
* The minutes of the meeting will be sent to the patient/relevant person after the meeting.

**Resources**

* Infographic on mindful non-verbal communication: Click [here](https://www.bgs.org.uk/sites/default/files/content/PPE%20Infographic%20Final.pdf)
* Covid-19 Information HSE website: [www2.hse.ie](https://www2.hse.ie/)
* HSE Open Disclosure Policy: Click [here](https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/qid/other-quality-improvement-programmes/opendisclosure/hse-open-disclosure-full-policy-2019.pdf)
* HSE Open Disclosure resources for clinicians and organisations: Click [here](https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/qid/other-quality-improvement-programmes/opendisclosure/resourcesforcliniciansandorganisations.html)
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