How to Reassure Patients and Staff

Patients, families, and staff are very concerned about their risk of encountering Ebola in our organization. How can we reassure them and answer their questions?

Healthcare organizations across the continuum of care can take a wide variety of steps to reassure patients or residents, family members, and staff. Following are just a few examples:

- Create a multidisciplinary team to develop and review messages and materials. Make sure to include your organization’s Communications Department in the creation and dissemination of these messages and materials.

- Develop messages that outline:
  - The current case definition for Ebola
  - The essentials of infectability, transmission, and risk factors
  - Steps the organization has taken and is taking to protect patients or residents, families, and staff
  - Means for patient and staff feedback and questions – post answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on your organization’s website

- Consider communicating the scope of services that the facility would provide to an individual who fit the case definition for monitoring the development of the symptoms of Ebola (e.g., isolation and holding but not medical evaluation, medical evaluation but not treatment). Explain how this will help limit the risk of transmission to the facility’s patients and staff. Also explain what happens when the patient develops Ebola symptoms and how they will be transported to a healthcare facility and treated.

- Designate individuals who can field patient, media, and staff questions.
  - Develop talking points for these individuals.
  - Instruct staff on how to route phone calls, e-mails, and other communications about Ebola.

- Evaluate the messages from a health literacy perspective.
• Review materials with lay people for feedback on clarity.

• Issue messages in multiple formats and locations.

• Consider translating messages or signage into different languages depending on the community’s demographics. Examples include the following:
  
  • Signage and handouts
    
    • Executive Rounds where leadership, infection preventionists, and infectious disease physicians are available to answer questions
    
    • Meetings of the patient, resident, and family council
    
    • Recorded segments for the campus television channel
    
    • E-mails to staff and/or articles in staff newsletters
    
    • Staff meetings or discussions or daily safety briefings
    
    • A statement on the organization’s public website
    
    • Screen savers with pertinent information
    
    • Media releases
    
    • Social media

• Update messages and materials as necessary as circumstances change.
  
  • Be sure to maintain a document trail of the versions of these documents as they are updated

The organization should also develop a plan for crisis communication, which would be crucially important in the event of a confirmed Ebola case, for example. Tools to create a plan and materials are available from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Ready.gov, and other sources.