

Responding to Critical Stories

As a bespoke, relational feedback platform this document has been produced to support responding to stories on Care Opinion Australia.

Truth vs. Perception

For some service providers, the inability to identify the storyteller is perceived as an obstacle to being able to respond to a story with meaning, and being able to take any action. Yet we know many people do not share their stories for a resolution for themselves but for action to be taken around processes and procedures, or methods of communication for future service users.

Responding to stories shared on the Care Opinion platform is much less about looking for a particular patient record to resolve an issue for one individual. Instead, responding to connect is about listening to, and having compassion for one individual and taking action to improve services for many.

Here are a few on actions that could be taken without identifying the service user.

- Share the story with frontline (not just managerial) staff as a learning opportunity
- Look at existing processes in place for efficacy and the potential for improvement.
- Consider the role communication played in the experience and how that could be improved (e.g. reminding staff of the importance of communication around the issue raised).
- Identify any quality and safety issues and add them to the agenda of quality and safety meetings.
- If you are making changes as a result of the story, use them as evidence of partnering with consumers and using the consumer voice in service design and improvement for accreditation.

Remember, every person's perception of an experience passes through their own personal filters such as their personalities, past experiences, circumstances, emotions and cognition. Their account won't always align with staff recollections of events. Rather, an individual's story is an account of what they have walked away from an experience feeling and remembering.

As an anonymous platform, an initial investigation is not possible nor is it required. On Care Opinion, responding is about connecting with individuals who have taken the time, and often courage, to share their version of events and what it meant to them.

Responding relationally and with compassion means respecting that story and their version of events.

Here are some tips on how to construct your response to get the most out the opportunity a story shared on Care Opinion Australia presents.

Tips to Responding

1. Address and thank the author

As an anonymous platform, story authors are identified only by their username. It is best to address your response to the story author using that username as if it were their first name. Recognising the time they took to put their experience into writing is important to acknowledge.

Example: [Self admission | Care Opinion](#)

2. Validate the story author's feelings

Whether or not you agree with the author, it is important to respect and accept their feelings as being real for them.

Example: [Paediatric care | Care Opinion](#)

3. Be empathetic

Offer empathy for the reason they required care in the first place as well as for what occurred. Language is important and as a relational platform, we encourage you to use emotive words to avoid inadvertently sounding bureaucratic.

Example: [Compliment & Complaint | Care Opinion](#)

4. Apologise

Offer a genuine apology for what happened when feedback is critical. Remember that in service recovery, an apology is not an admission of liability but an expression of regret for a negative experience.

Example: [My elderly parent Badly broke wrist and went to ED | Care Opinion](#)

5. Inform and educate

Where possible, use the opportunity to inform and educate the story author. For example:

- Explain what the usual process is and/or what ideally occurs in a 'normal' situation / appointment / clinical presentation.
- If the situation arises due to a particular policy, explain that policy and the rationale for it (e.g. visitor restrictions/waiting lists/triage).

Where appropriate, ask staff what they believe it would help consumers to know and share this in the response.

Example: [Waiting time and treatment for asthma | Care Opinion](#)

6. Explain your next steps

Explain what you will do with the story (feedback) received. Ensure you then commit to the action detailed in your response. It is also beneficial to post a follow-up response after you have taken these actions to confirm that it has occurred.

Example: [Treatment in hospital | Care Opinion](#)

7. Provide a pathway

Provide a pathway for the consumer to make contact offline if appropriate. It is best if you can provide an individual staff member's name, phone number and/or email address is best. If a centralised feedback service (e.g. a Consumer Liaison or Patient Experience Team) needs to be the first point of contact, explain why they are best placed to assist the story author.

It is also useful to explain how they will be kept safe if their identity is revealed and why you want them to make contact. We recommend framing this invitation as an option the consumer may wish to pursue rather than this contact being contingent on the feedback being used.

Example: [Multiple bed changes | Care Opinion](#)

8. Signpost

Signpost other services that may be helpful/useful where relevant if appropriate. These may be community support services that are offered by external organisations. For example:

- traumatic childbirth experiences can result in postnatal depression and signposting to postnatal support services is helpful.
- the loss of a loved one can result in difficulty in accepting that loss. Signposting to bereavement support services is an act of compassion.
- surgery delays can reduce a person's quality of life. Patients may not be aware of services that support people with chronic illness or pain.

Example: [Emergency Department Experience After Stillbirth | Care Opinion](#)

9. Sign your response

Regardless of whether you have a subscription and account with Care Opinion, it is best to sign your response with at least your name underneath your response content. This personalises your response and helps to demonstrate to the story author that an individual person has heard them.

If your organisation does not have a subscription with Care Opinion Australia, you will not have a profile bar containing your job title and organisation name above your response. Therefore, you may also wish to include these details in your signature at the end of the response.

Example: [Missed diagnosis | Care Opinion](#)