



# Clinical Update

## For Telephone Triage Nurses

November - December 2008

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### In this Issue:

- Hand-Off Communications
- SBAR

### Hand-Off Communication

- Essential skill for telephone triage nurse.
- Transfer of care from provider to next provider.

### References:

1. National Patient Safety Goals <http://www.jointcommission.org/patientsafety/nationalpatientsafetygoals>
2. SBAR: a shared mental model for improving communication between clinicians. [Jt Comm J Qual Patient Saf. 2006 Mar;32\(3\):167-75.](http://jtc.com/jqual/patient_saf.2006.Mar;32(3):167-75)

## Communicating with Healthcare Colleagues (Part I)

### Dear Nursing Colleague:

Effective **Hand-Off** Communication is an essential skill for a telephone triage nurse to master.

A hand-off occurs every time the care of a patient is transferred from a current provider/care giver to a next provider/care giver.

Hand-off communication is the interactive delivery of accurate and current information about a patient exchanged from one provider/care giver to another.

The imagery that this should evoke is of the quarterback on a football team handing-off the football to another player. This hand-off can go well, in which case the team may gain some yards or score a goal. The hand-off can go poorly in which case the team can fumble the ball.

To extend this analogy further, as telephone triage nurses and healthcare providers we want to have successful hand-offs, move the ball down the field, and not have any fumbles.

The Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations has made hand-off communications a national patient safety goal. Why does JCAHO consider this so important.?

A recent JCAHO report noted that: *"Ineffective communication is the most frequently cited category of root causes of sentinel events. Effective communication, which is timely, accurate, complete, unambiguous, and understood by the recipient, reduces error and results in improved patient safety."*

Furthermore, *"patients are most at risk during transitions in care (hand offs) across settings, services, providers, or levels of care."*

**A Question.** How can we structure our nurse-nurse and nurse-physician communications so that we have a great hand-off?

### Hand Off Communication.

Hand off communication is the interactive delivery of accurate and current information about a patient exchanged from one provider/care giver to another.

### JCAHO National Patient Safety Goal 2E

Implement a standardized approach to "hand-off" communications. Including an opportunity to ask and respond to questions.

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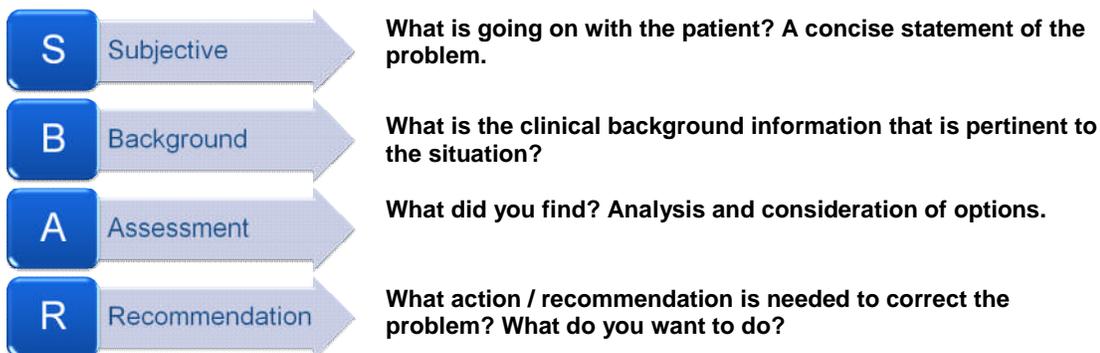


**An Answer:** You may know these two great hand-off acronyms already: **SBAR** and **SSOAPQ**. Here is some information about SBAR.

### SBAR

SBAR is an acronym that was first developed and used by the U.S. Navy nuclear submarine service. They used this acronym as a mnemonic for improving military communication.

Recently SBAR has been promoted as an effective tool for communicating in a standardized manner with other healthcare providers. SBAR promotes patient safety because it helps nurses and physicians organize the manner in which they communicate with each other. Nurses and physicians can use SBAR to share what information is important about a patient. It improves efficiency because this standardized form of communication helps caregivers speak about patients in a concise and complete way.



### Three Examples — When You Might want to use SBAR

- *Nurse-Nurse communication about a patient.* For example, a triage nurse calling a brief report to the local emergency department.
- *Nurse-Physician communication about a patient.* For example, a triage nurse discussing a patient with the on-call physician.
- *Quality Improvement.* Submitting an idea verbally or in writing that addresses a problem or improves a process.

Next issue we will be discussing another acronym: SSOAPQ.

**Schmitt-Thompson**  
**Clinical Content**

Happy Holidays and Regards!

David Thompson, MD

**Acronyms - Acronyms can serve as mnemonics (or memory tools) for reminding us to complete each step in a task. For example, RICE serves as a mnemonic for treatment of musculoskeletal injuries:**

- REST
- ICE
- COMPRESSION
- ELEVATION

### A Training Exercise

- ◆ Create role-playing scenarios for the three examples to the left.
- ◆ Act them out at your next staff meeting.
- ◆ An example role-playing script is available at: <http://www.stcc-triage.com/download/sbar.pdf>

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