Unsafe Patient Handoffs in Hospitals

- A Persistent Threat to Patient Safety

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- ENG 112 – Final Presentation

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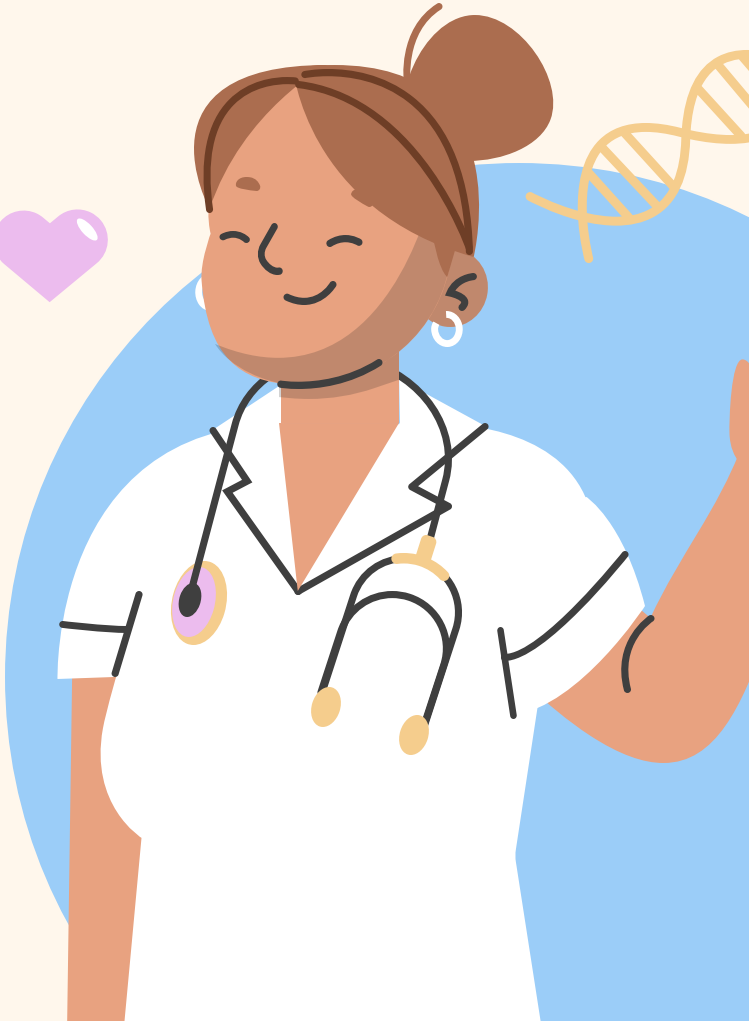

What Is a Patient Handoff?

- Transfer of responsibility for a patient
- Happens during:
- Shift changes
- Moves between units (e.g., ER → inpatient)
- Transfers between teams
- Critical moment for communication

Why Unsafe Handoffs Matter

01

Missing info about:

- Medications & allergies
- Lab results & test status
- Care plans & code status

02

Leads to:

- Delays in treatment
- Wrong decisions
- Preventable harm

03

- **Starmer et al. (2014):**
  - 23% fewer errors
  - 30% fewer harmful events with I-PASS

Main Causes of Unsafe Handoffs

- High workloads & time pressure
- No standard format (everyone reports differently)
- Little or no training on handoff skills
- Fragmented documentation and EHR use
- Communication breakdowns → major incidents (Manser & Foster, 2020)

Advantages1: Standardized Handoff Models

I-PASS

- Illness severity
- Patient summary
- Action list
- Situation awareness
- Synthesis by receiver

SBAR

- Situation
- Background
- Assessment
- Recommendation
- Provide clear, consistent structure

Solution 2: Training & Simulation

- **Regular training on I-PASS & SBAR**
- **Simulation of real shift-change scenarios**

Builds:

- Confidence
- Read-back habits
- Closed-loop communication
- **Müller et al. (2018): improved quality & completeness of handoffs**

Solution 3: Digital Tools & Safety Culture

- **EHR templates and checklists**
- **Required fields (allergies, meds, code status, labs)**
- **Prompts and reminders**
- **Abraham et al. (2013): multi-component interventions improve safety**
- **Leadership:**
  - Protect time for handoffs
  - Encourage questions & clarification
  - Audit and recognize good practice

Conclusion

- Unsafe handoffs = persistent threat to patient safety
- Structured models + training + digital support
- Better handoffs → safer patients, less stress for staff
- “Improving handoff communication is essential for high-quality, coordinated care.”