“Hand-Off” Communication
National Patient Safety Goals

Requirement 2E
Implement a standardized approach to “hand-off” communications, including an opportunity to ask and respond to questions.

Rationale for Requirement 2E
The primary objective of a “hand off” is to provide accurate information about a patient’s care, treatment, and services, current condition and any recent or anticipated changes. The information communicated during a hand off must be accurate in order to meet patient safety goals.

In health care there are numerous types of patient hand offs, including but not limited to nursing shift changes, physicians transferring complete responsibility for a patient, physicians transferring on-call responsibility, temporary responsibility for staff leaving the unit for a short time, anesthesiologist report to post-anesthesia recovery room nurse, nursing and physician hand off from the emergency department to inpatient units, different hospitals, nursing homes and home health care, critical laboratory and radiology results sent to physician offices.

[2E] What is a “hand-off” communication?
The phrase “hand-off communication” refers to a real-time process of passing patient/client/resident-specific information from one caregiver to another or from one team of caregivers to another for the purpose of ensuring the continuity and safety of the patient/client/resident's care.

The information is usually about the patient’s current condition, ongoing treatment, recent changes in condition, and possible changes or complications to watch out for. Examples include nursing change-of-shift report; physician sign-out to a covering physician; anesthesia provider or circulating nurse report to the PACU staff; ED staff communication with staff at a receiving facility when a patient is transferred.

[2E] What is meant by “standardizing” an approach to “hand off communication”?
This means your organization must define, communicate to staff, and implement a process in which information about patient/client/resident care is communicated in a consistent manner. Standardization provides a means to educate staff about the process and helps support consistent implementation throughout the organization. A standardized approach should identify the following items:

- The “hand-off” situations that it applies to
- Who is, or should be, involved in the communication
- What information should be communicated, for example, Diagnoses and current condition of the patient/client/resident
- Recent changes in condition or treatment
- Anticipated changes in condition or treatment
- What to watch for in the next interval of care
- Opportunities to ask and respond to questions
- When to use certain techniques (repeat-back; SBAR)
- What print or electronic information should be available