



# Safety Alert 002/07

9 May 2007

## Communication Systems

Urgent communication with senior medical practitioners and other on-call staff

### Distributed to:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance
- Directors of Clinical Operations
- Directors of Corporate Services

### Action required by:

- Directors of Clinical Governance

### For response by:

- Directors of Clinical Governance

### We recommend you also inform:

- Area Directors of Nursing and Midwifery
- Area Directors of Medical Services
- Area Directors of Allied Health

### Deadline for completion of action

**13 July 2007**

### Quality and Safety Branch

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### Background

The NSW Department of Health was recently advised by a medical practitioner that he is not receiving timely communications about his patients from two public hospitals.

When he was unable to immediately answer some telephone calls from these two hospitals, he could not call back as the numbers were displayed as "Private Number".

The medical practitioner also stated that, in some instances, voicemail messages were not available for several hours.

The failure to receive timely information about a patient may affect the treatment, care and outcomes for that patient.

This is a significant issue as health services and clinicians, including medical practitioners, have a duty of care to their patients.

### Actions by Health Services

Health services should have communication systems in place to ensure that:

- Senior medical practitioners can receive timely information about their patients.
- On-call clinicians and other health service staff can be accessed when required.

When developing communication systems, consider the following:

- DO use a system that ensures clinicians and other on-call health service staff receive timely information eg. pager system.
- DO ensure that senior and on-call clinicians have advised the health service of their contact details and mode of contact.
- DO NOT assume that messages left on a telephone, either fixed or mobile, have been received by the clinician or health service staff member.

The NSW Department of Health will explore possible statewide solutions to this communications issue.

### Action required by Area Health Services

1. Ensure local communication systems are in place and are working effectively.