YOUR RIGHTS TO SAFE, QUALITY HEALTH CARE

A simple guide to the proposed review of healthcare norms and standards

~For Community Structures, Healthcare Users, Families and Public~

October 2026

OHSC
Office of Health Standards Compliance
Ensuring quality and safety in health care

2 INTRODUCTION

Everyone who receives healthcare services has the right to expect **safe, respectful and good-quality care**.

The **norms and standards regulations are currently under review** to ensure that health services, in general:

Are safe and of good quality;

Treat people with dignity and respect;

Provide care without unnecessary delays;

Protect confidentiality and security of people's health information;

Prevent and control healthcare-associated infections;

INTRODUCTION… Cont.

Learn from errors and adverse events and use those lessons to improve care;

Have the required medicines, equipment and supplies;

Have clean and safe buildings and facilities;

Employ and support competent health-care workers;

Protect patients from harm;

Use digital health and artificial intelligence safely and responsibly.

Of Importance: We are here to conduct the consultation to ensure that your voice and wishes are well represented.

4 WHAT DO THESE NORMS AND STANDARDS REGULATIONS MEAN?

- **The norms and standards regulations set out the basic standards that health facilities are expected to meet.**
- In simple terms, they ask: **"What must a health facility do to provide safe, respectful and high-quality health care?"**
- The Office of Health Standards Compliance (OHSC) **uses norms and standards to guide inspections to assess whether health facilities** meet the requirements for safe, quality health care.
- The **current review aims to clarify, standardise, and better align the rules with modern healthcare**.
- It also places greater emphasis on preventing problems before they arise, learning from mistakes, and continuously improving services.

5 YOUR BASIC RIGHTS AS A HEALTH-CARE USER

- ❤️ **Be treated with respect:** You should be treated with **kindness, dignity and compassion**. Your culture, beliefs and personal circumstances should be respected.
- 🛡️ **Be safe:** You should receive care in a **safe environment**. Health-care workers and the healthcare facility should take reasonable steps to prevent you from being harmed.
- 🔒 **Have your privacy respected:** Your body, personal information and health information should be kept private and treated respectfully.
- ℹ️ **Receive information:** You should be given clear information about the health services available to you, including how and where to access help.
- ⚖️ **Be treated fairly:** You should not be treated unfairly because of your circumstances, disability, or other special needs. Health services should consider the needs of vulnerable people and those living with disabilities.
- 🤝 **Be involved in your care:** You are part of your healthcare team. Where appropriate, you should receive sufficient information to understand your care and make informed choices about it.

6 INFORMATION YOU SHOULD RECEIVE

A health facility should make important information easy to find. This includes information about:

- What services are available;
- When services are open;
- Visiting hours, where applicable;
- Your rights and responsibilities;
- Applicable fees before services begin;
- How to make a complaint;
- How to give suggestions or compliments;
- How to access services;
- Relevant waiting times; and
- Information about the National Health Insurance Fund (NHI), where applicable.

The facility should also display its relevant licence or permit and the required compliance information.
In simple terms: You should not have to guess where to go, when a service is available, what it may cost, or how to raise a concern.

7 WAITING TIMES AND ACCESS TO CARE

Nobody wants to spend unnecessary time waiting for health care. Health facilities are expected to:

- Monitor how long people wait;
- Display waiting times in waiting areas;
- Act when waiting times are too long;
- Monitor delays for specialist services;
- Monitor delays for planned procedures and admissions; and
- Work to reduce unnecessary delays.

Emergency care is different: People who are seriously ill or injured should be prioritised according to the urgency of their condition. This means the person who needs urgent care most should be attended to first. This process is called **triage**, which, in simple terms, means sorting patients by how urgently they need help.

8 ACCESS TO CARE AND REFERRALS

Health facilities should make it easy for people to find their way around. There should be clear signs directing people to areas such as:

- **Reception; Consultation areas; Emergency services; Pharmacies; Toilets; Wards; and Other important services.**

Information should also be accessible to people with hearing or visual difficulties. **When do you need another service?** Sometimes a clinic cannot provide everything you need, so you may need to be referred to:

- **a hospital; a specialist; another clinic; a community service; or another health-care provider.**

The proposed standards require health facilities to have systems in place to ensure referrals are handled effectively. A referral should not simply mean: "Go somewhere else." There should be proper communication between services. The receiving service should know why you have been referred, and the original service should receive appropriate feedback.

- **People living with complex long-term conditions**, disabilities or social difficulties should receive coordinated support. Where appropriate, a person should have someone to coordinate their care.

9 YOUR HEALTH RECORDS AND PRIVACY

Your health information is private. Your health record may include information such as:

- your personal details; your medical history; examination findings; test results; diagnoses; treatment; medicines; and
- other information about your care.

The health facility must protect this information. Your information should not be shared with anyone. Information may generally be shared when:

- You have given permission; the law requires it; a court requires it; or there is a serious public-health reason.

Can you access your health record? The proposed regulations provide for a system that allows patients to request access to their records.

When you leave the hospital? You should receive a discharge report from your healthcare provider at the time of discharge. This helps you understand what happened during your care and what you need to know after leaving.

10 SAFE CLINICAL CARE

Health facilities should have systems that enable healthcare workers to provide safe and effective care. This includes using appropriate, up-to-date clinical guidelines. Health facilities should check whether these guidelines are being followed and act when problems are identified.

Before, during and after high-risk procedures: Safety checks should be used for procedures such as surgery. Health facilities should have systems to:

- Correctly identify patients;
- Check procedures before they happen;
- Use medicines safely;
- Use injections safely;
- Manage emergencies;
- Protect people during high-risk procedures;
- Protect people from unnecessary radiation;
- Identify vulnerable patients;
- Safely transfer patients; and
- Ensure important information is passed from one health-care worker to another.

Getting help when you need it: Patients should have a way to contact healthcare professionals when urgent assistance is needed.

11 CLINICAL CARE PROCESS AND MANAGEMENT

When I go to a clinic or hospital, I should expect healthcare workers to know **what they are doing and how to treat me properly**. The clinic or hospital should:

- Follow proper medical guidelines when treating me.
- Have a clear plan for my treatment, including knowing when I need to be referred or sent to another hospital.
- Make sure healthcare workers know the latest treatment guidelines and follow them.
- Keep proper records of my treatment and regularly check those records to make sure things are being done correctly.
- Give me a way to get help quickly if my condition becomes serious or I need urgent assistance.

In simple terms:

- When I go to a healthcare facility, I should receive the right care from people who know what they are doing and follow the right procedures, and I should be able to get help when I urgently need it.

YOUR RIGHT TO COMPLAIN AND GIVE FEEDBACK

You have the right to speak up about your experience. Health facilities should have systems for:

- Complaints;
- Compliments;
- Suggestions;
- Patient experience surveys; and
- Reporting safety incidents.

You should be provided with information on how to use these systems. Health facilities should also learn from complaints and safety incidents rather than simply filing them away.

A complaint should be an opportunity to improve. The proposed regulations also require health facilities to display the results of patient-experience surveys conducted over the previous 12 months.

13 PREVENTING INFECTIONS

Health facilities should take measures to prevent the spread of infection. This includes:

- Hand washing;
- Hand sanitising;
- Cleaning;
- Appropriate protective clothing;
- Safe handling of infectious materials;
- Appropriate isolation facilities;
- Infection monitoring;
- Training of health-care workers; and
- Educating patients and visitors.

There should be facilities and supplies for hand hygiene in appropriate areas. People with contagious infections may need to be cared for in suitable rooms or areas to reduce the spread of infection.

Everyone has a role. Patients, visitors and healthcare workers can all help prevent infections by following appropriate hygiene measures.

SAFE HEALTH-CARE WASTE

Health-care facilities generate different types of waste. Some waste is ordinary, while other waste can be dangerous and pose a risk to people or the environment if not handled safely. **Examples of HE waste include**

- Used needles and other sharp medical items; Materials that may be contaminated with infectious substances; Certain chemicals; Unused or expired medicines; Body tissues; and Other hazardous materials.

Health facilities must safely separate, store, transport, and dispose of this waste. **Why does this matter?** Poor waste management can harm:

- Patients; Health-care workers; Visitors; Waste workers; Communities; and The environment.

Used needles and other sharp objects must be handled and disposed of safely.

15 MEASURING WHETHER HEALTH CARE IS WORKING

A good health service should not only ask:

"Did we provide the service?"

It should also ask: **"Did the service actually help the person?"**

Health facilities should monitor whether their services are achieving good health outcomes and use the information to improve care. They should identify problems and take corrective action.

Your experience matters too... Health facilities should ask patients about their experiences and outcomes. For example:

- Did your health improve?
- Did you receive the care and support you needed?
- Were you treated with dignity and respect?
- What could have been better?
- This information should help improve services.

16 SPECIALISED HEALTH SERVICES

The proposed regulations set out standards for several specialised services:

- **Kidney and dialysis services:** Services for people with kidney disease or kidney failure should provide safe, life-supporting treatment. Patients should have access, where needed, to appropriate professionals. People receiving dialysis should also be given appropriate information about how their data is used in the South African Renal Registry.
- **Cancer services:** Cancer services should support - Prevention; Diagnosis; Treatment; and the wider needs of people living with cancer. Services should monitor waiting lists and ensure that appropriate equipment and supplies are available. Patients and families should also have access to psychosocial support where appropriate.
- **School health:** School health services should focus on - Preventing illness; Promoting health; and Supporting the health needs of children at school. These programmes should be coordinated with the education sector.
- **HIV and Tuberculosis services:** Health facilities should work to prevent and treat HIV and tuberculosis. These efforts include - Appropriate testing; Infection prevention; Treatment; Monitoring people receiving treatment; Following up with people who miss treatment; Following up with people who do not attend appointments, and Making sure referred patients reach the service they were referred to.
- **Oral and dental health:** Health services should provide appropriate Oral health assessments, oral health education, prevention, and Dental treatment.
- **Mental health services:** People receiving mental health care must be treated with dignity. Health facilities should: follow the law when admitting and caring for people receiving mental health services; provide appropriate treatment and rehabilitation; protect patients, staff, and visitors; and ensure that people receive care in a safe environment.

17 MEDICINES, EQUIPMENT AND TESTS

Medical equipment: Medical equipment should:

- Be available when needed; Work properly; Be maintained; Be cleaned appropriately; Be safe to use; and Be used by trained health-care workers.

Equipment problems that may harm patients should be reported and addressed.

Medicines: Health facilities should have systems to ensure medicines are:

- Stored safely; Available when needed; Properly controlled; Prescribed safely; Dispensed safely; and Administered safely.

Problems or adverse reactions linked to medicines should be reported and managed. In simple terms, patients should not be put at unnecessary risk because medicines are missing, poorly stored or mishandled.

18 TESTING, BLOOD AND STERILISATION

Diagnostic tests: Diagnostic services include radiology tests (for example, X-rays, Sonography, CT scans); laboratory tests; and other tests used to assess a person's health. These services should:

- Be available when required; Provide accurate results; Protect people from unnecessary harm; Provide results within agreed timeframes; Monitor quality; and report and manage problems.

Blood and blood products: Blood and blood products must be:

- Stored safely; Handled correctly; Transported appropriately; Checked for quality; and Given safely to patients.

If a person has a harmful reaction to blood or a blood product, it should be reported and managed.

Sterilisation: Equipment used in patient care must be properly cleaned, disinfected and sterilised as required. Health facilities should monitor the process and respond if sterilisation fails.

19 HOW HEALTH FACILITIES SHOULD BE MANAGED

A health service needs more than doctors and nurses. It also needs effective management. The proposed standards expect health facilities to have systems for:

- Planning; Budgeting; Buying supplies; Managing equipment; Managing information; Monitoring performance; Managing risks; and Improving services.

Money should support patient care: Health facilities should monitor their spending and budgets. If financial problems could disrupt health services, they should be identified and addressed promptly.

Supplies should be available: Health facilities should work to prevent shortages of essential supplies.

- Medicines; Medical supplies; Equipment; and Other necessary items.

Equipment and other assets should be properly recorded and managed.

HEALTH-CARE WORKERS AND WORKPLACE SAFETY

Good patient care depends on having the right people with the right skills. Health facilities should have systems in place for:

- Recruiting staff; Planning staffing needs; Evaluating performance; Identifying training needs; Supporting staff development; Checking professional registration; and Maintaining appropriate professional cover where required.

Health-care workers also need protection: health facilities should safeguard them from workplace hazards. They should do so by:

- Identify workplace risks; Provide appropriate training; Manage workplace incidents; Support employee wellness; Monitor workers who are exposed to certain risks; and maintain disaster plans.

21 SAFE BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES

A health facility should be a safe place. Buildings and grounds should be properly maintained and meet applicable safety requirements. This includes:

- Fire safety; Electrical safety; Gas safety; Medical gas systems; Emergency exits; Safe walkways and stairs; Adequate ventilation; Appropriate access for people with disabilities; Functioning lifts where applicable; and Regular maintenance of buildings and infrastructure.

Emergency exits should be kept clear. Floors and walkways should not be hazardous or obstructed by objects, rubbish or equipment.

22 WATER, ELECTRICITY AND OTHER BASIC SERVICES

Health care cannot continue safely without basic services. Health facilities should have reliable:

- Electricity; Backup electricity; Lighting; Water; Backup water where needed; Medical gases; Drainage; and Sewerage systems.

Equipment supporting these services should be maintained regularly.

Why these matters: Power failure, water shortage or failure of medical gases can put patients at risk. Reliable health services, therefore, need backup plans.

23 CLEANING, LAUNDRY AND FOOD

Cleaning - Health facilities should have:

- Cleaning schedules; Appropriate cleaning materials; Trained cleaning staff; Checks on cleaning performance; and Pest-control programmes.

Clean environments help reduce infections and improve the experience for patients and visitors.

Laundry and linen - Clean and dirty linen must be managed to prevent contamination. Health facilities should have systems in place for:

- Washing linen; Separating clean and dirty linen; Maintaining laundry equipment; Managing linen supplies; and dealing with contaminated linen.

Food - Food provided to patients should be safe and suitable for their needs. Food services should consider the following:

- Health needs; Medical conditions; Cultural needs; and Religious needs.
- Kitchens should comply with appropriate food hygiene requirements.

24 MORTUARY SERVICES

When someone dies in a health facility, their body must be treated with dignity and respect. Health facilities should have systems in place for:

- Identifying the deceased correctly;
- Recording information;
- Safely storing bodies;
- Safely transporting bodies;
- Protecting bodies from loss or unauthorised access;
- Verifying identity before release; and
- Allowing appropriate viewing by families and authorised people.

Families should be treated with respect during this difficult time.

25 TRANSPORT AND AMBULANCE-RELATED SERVICES

Health-facility vehicles should be:

- Safe;
- Properly maintained;
- Appropriately licensed; and
- Used by authorised drivers.

The health facility should maintain records of vehicle use and maintenance. When patients need to be transferred to another facility, the transfer should be properly coordinated and safe.

SECURITY

Everyone should feel reasonably safe in a health facility. Security systems should protect:

- Patients;
- Families;
- Visitors;
- Health-care workers; and
- Property.

- Health facilities should identify their security risks and have plans to manage them. Security incidents should be reported and appropriately investigated.

DIGITAL HEALTH AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI should not replace health professionals; it should support healthcare professionals rather than replace their judgment. Healthcare professionals should be able to:

- Review AI results; Question them; Check whether they make sense; Reject them when necessary; and Remain responsible for important clinical decisions.

A computer should not make important decisions about a person's health without appropriate human oversight. AI must be safe and properly tested. Before and during use, AI systems should be checked to ensure they are:

- Safe; Reliable; Effective; Suitable for their intended purpose; and Appropriate for the South African health-care environment.

If an AI system poses safety risks, the health facility should take action.

28 DIGITAL HEALTH AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Health care is increasingly using computers, electronic records, telemedicine and artificial intelligence (AI).

The proposed regulations recognise that these technologies can be useful but also pose new risks.

The basic rule is:

- **Technology must serve people,** not put people at unnecessary risk. **Your privacy still matters.**

Health facilities must protect your health information when it is stored or used electronically. Only authorised personnel should have access to your information.

Systems should have appropriate security measures.

- **You should be told when important AI is being used.** Where digital technology or AI plays a significant role in your care or in a decision that affects you, the proposed regulations require that you be informed. You should have ways to raise concerns or make complaints about the use of such technology.

DIGITAL HEALTH AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AI must be fair. Technology should not unfairly disadvantage people because of their circumstances or characteristics. Health facilities should assess whether technology works fairly for different groups of people. Special care should be taken with vulnerable people, including:

- Children; Older people; People with disabilities; and People who have difficulty understanding health information.

Health information must be protected: Digital health systems should protect information from:

- Unauthorised access; Loss; Misuse; Inappropriate sharing; and Security threats.

Health facilities should also have plans to recover from computer system failures.

Telemedicine: Telemedicine means receiving health services using technology when the patient and health-care professional are not in the same place. The proposed regulations include telemedicine as part of the digital-health framework. The same basic principles still apply:

- safe care, privacy, appropriate professional responsibility, good information, and patient protection.

30 WHAT SHOULD A RELIABLE HEALTH SERVICE LOOK LIKE?

A highly reliable health service should not wait for something to go wrong before taking action. It should continually ask:

- "What could go wrong?“; "How can we prevent it?“; "If something goes wrong, what can we learn?“; "How can we make the service better?"

A reliable health facility should therefore:

- Listen to patients.
- Protect people from harm.
- Learn from mistakes.
- Measure results.
- Act on problems.
- Support its staff.
- Keep its facilities safe.
- Protect people's information.
- Use technology responsibly.
- Keep improving.

WHAT CAN YOU AS A HEALTH-CARE USER EXPECT?

- **Infection prevention:** The environment should be managed to reduce the spread of infection.
- **Clean facilities:** The health-care environment should be clean and maintained.
- **Safe equipment:** Equipment used in your care should be appropriate, functional and maintained.
- **A way to complain:** You should know how to raise concerns, make suggestions or give compliments.
- **Continuity of care:** When you are referred or transferred, information should follow you, and your care should be coordinated.
- **Protection of vulnerable people:** Additional safeguards should be provided where people may be particularly vulnerable.

WHAT CAN YOU AS A HEALTH-CARE USER EXPECT?

When you visit a health facility, you should expect:

- **Respect:** You should be treated with dignity and compassion.
- **Information:** You should be told about available services and how to access them.
- **Privacy:** Your personal and health information should be protected.
- **Safe care:** Reasonable steps should be taken to prevent harm.
- **Appropriate priority:** People with urgent conditions should receive attention according to their level of need.
- **Clear directions:** Signs and information should help you find your way.
- **Safe medicine:** Medicines should be properly managed and administered.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Patients and communities are also key partners in creating safer health services. You can:

- Ask questions when you do not understand something;
- Provide accurate information about your health;
- Tell health-care workers about concerns;
- Follow agreed instructions where possible;
- Ask how to access your health records;
- Report unsafe conditions;
- Use the complaints and feedback system;
- Give compliments when services are good;
- Suggest improvements; and
- Speak up if you believe something may put a patient at risk.

Speaking up helps health services learn: A complaint is not necessarily an attack on a healthcare worker. It can be an opportunity to identify a problem and prevent it from happening to someone else.

THE BIG PICTURE

The proposed regulations can be understood through five simple questions:

- **ARE PEOPLE SAFE?:** Health facilities should identify risks and prevent avoidable harm.
- **ARE PEOPLE TREATED WITH DIGNITY?:** Patients should be respected, informed and treated as people, not numbers.
- **IS THE CARE GOOD?:** Health facilities should use appropriate practices, measure results and improve where necessary.
- **IS THE SYSTEM WORKING?** Management should ensure that staff, equipment, medicines, buildings, information, and money are properly managed.
- **ARE WE LEARNING AND IMPROVING?:** Problems, complaints, incidents, and patient feedback should be used to improve health services.

A SIMPLE MESSAGE FOR EVERY HEALTH-CARE USER

You matter.

- Your safety matters.
- Your dignity matters.
- Your privacy matters.
- Your experience matters.
- Your voice matters.
- Good health care is not only about treating illness.

It is also about making sure that every person who enters a health facility is treated safely, respectfully and fairly.

Safe care: Quality care, Respectful care, Care that listens, Care that learns, Care that keeps improving.

CONTACT THE OHSC (FORWARD YOUR INPUT)

Submit Your Inputs

communication@ohsc.org.za

Enquiries

Mr Medupe Simasiku
Deputy Director: Corporate Communication
+27 66 300 0111
+27 12 942 7712
msimasiku@ohsc.org.za

Ms Ntombizodwa Kobuwe
Manager: Marketing and Stakeholder Relations
+27 83 250 7326
+27 12 942 7721
nkobuwe@ohsc.org.za

Ms Molorana Molekoa
Senior Administrator: Communication and Stakeholder Relations
+27 64 890 1467
+27 12 942 7725
mmolekoa@ohsc.org.za

General Information

Website: www.ohsc.org.za
General Enquiries: +27 12 942 7700

Complaints

Complaints Hotline: +27 80 911 6472
complaints@ohsc.org.za

Follow OHSC on Social Media

Facebook | X | LinkedIn | YouTube | Instagram

@OHSCSocialmedia

THANK YOU — YOUR VOICE MATTERS

OHSC

Office of Health Standards Compliance

Ensuring quality and safety in health care

ngiyathokoza! ro livhuwa!

dankie! ke a leboga! enkosi!

thank you! ndo livhuwa!

inkomu! ngiyabonga!

ke a leboha!

siyabonga!

www.ohsc.org.za

+27 (0)12 942 7700