

## STEPS TO DETERMINE LEVELS OF DISCLOSURE

This tool is intended to be used on an institutional level as an aid in establishing a policy on disclosure. There are three defined steps that need to be followed in the process of deciding what the organization's appropriate response should be to various types of incidents. They are (1) rating the severity of a range of possible incidents on a severity scale; (2) weighing the benefits and harms of disclosure; and (3) taking into consideration relevant ethical and legal guiding principles. Based on this exercise, an organization will be better able to determine its threshold level for disclosure. The schema shown below can be adapted for use by individual organizations.

### (Step 1) Rating incidents on a severity scale

The first step is to rate, on a severity scale, the range of possible incidents that an organization may encounter. This schema is used to classify the nature of the incidents and their level of impact. Included in this tool are a sample severity scale and error algorithm developed by the National Coordinating Council for Medication Error Reporting and Prevention (NCC MERP). The severity scale is used to drive the disclosure policy by determining which classifications of incidents would generally warrant disclosure. (see NCC MERP indexes for [categorizing medication errors](#) and accompanying [algorithm](#))



### (Step 2) Taking potential benefits and harms into account

There are a series of issues presented in this tool to think through and reflect upon in relation to the level of severity of each incident. These issues are framed in terms of the potential benefits and harms of disclosure, and in relation to who is affected (patient - practitioner - organization). For example, if an injury is sustained as a result of an incident, a question to ask is: "What is the best thing to do in terms of the patient-centered interests?" In this case, the relative weight of the potential benefits or harms of disclosure to this patient may likely shift the decision to disclose in support of full disclosure. (see [Appendices B-1, B-2, & B-3](#))



### (Step 3) Taking guiding principles into account

The final step is then to weigh the relative potential benefits and harms of disclosure against the guiding principles that are intended to influence the decision-making process, as the final parameter. Keep in mind that these guiding principles must carry greater weight in the final equation, by virtue of the fact that they represent critical ethical and legal imperatives. In most cases, this final parameter will supersede other considerations, so that even though it may be otherwise determined that disclosure is not necessarily required, disclosure nonetheless may be strongly encouraged. (see [Appendix C](#))

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