



How to Write an Open Note

Executive Summary:

Open Notes are what we call progress notes that are available to patients. **Most patients want to see their documentation as it is currently written, including specific medical language, as they most often share them with other providers. HOWEVER, consider alternate wording in some situations.**

CONSIDER CHANGING	ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTION
Possibly pejorative wording	
<i>Highly anxious, drug-abusing patient...</i>	Patient uses injection drugs... Note: anxiety, if important, should be included.
<i>Patient refuses to take his pills...</i>	Patient has been non-adherent to therapy... or Patient has had difficulty tolerating ... or Patient has had difficulty affording ... (find out why!)
<i>The GI service refuses to scope the patient</i>	Continue discussion with GI about endoscopy timing. The medical record is not a place for venting, even if the author is tired or frustrated.
Possibly misunderstood wording	
<i>Morbidly obese</i>	BMI > 30. Or Morbid Obesity relating to worse knee pain. or Obesity: patient working hard on weight loss. Balance dx wording for coding and for patient reading.
<i>Patient was SOB. F/U next appt.</i>	Patient was short of breath. Followup at next appointment. Use EHR auto-correct dictionary tools to auto-expand commonly misunderstood or impenetrable acronyms. Or use speech recognition tools (much improved in recent years)
Behavioral health wording	
<i>Shows symptoms of major depression and has had thoughts of suicide...</i>	If mental health symptoms are discussed openly, no reason to redact this. Open psychiatry notes have been shown to increase patient trust and reduce stigma.
<i>Patient is paranoid, but refuses to acknowledge this...</i>	Patient states: 'There is a transmitter in my tooth. It talks to me.' Simple quotes without judgement can be effective.
<i>Patient with narcissistic personality ...</i>	Patient with axis II personality. Is this detail important to care for this patient?
Adolescent care	
<i>14-year-old patient has a positive pregnancy test</i>	Parent proxy access to a minor patient's chart (including notes and results) automatically stops at birthday age 14 (standard policy at UCHealth).
Legal or other proceedings	
<i>Results of FNE (forensic nurse exam)</i>	FNE and similar notes that usually involve legal proceedings will not be auto-released to patients.
<i>Domestic partner of mother of neonate is unaware that he is not the father...</i>	Notes that are likely to be involved in legal or other proceedings are excluded from the federal requirement to share. Can uncheck the box for " Share with patient " to redact a specific note. A reason, specifying anticipated harm, will be required.
Empathy, Teamwork, Support	
Tell patients about Open Notes, solicit feedback	Let them know the purpose of medical notes (for doctor, nurse communication, tracking progress), and the benefits of patients reading: helping remember plans, reasons for tests and treatment.
Manage disagreement	Although you and I disagree on diagnosis, I cannot change my medical assessment. Sometimes this is an opportunity for more open dialogue.
Be empathic, supportive	Write not only about pathology, about patient efforts, improvement. Patient is tracking his blood pressure. and We are available for questions.
Emphasize teamwork	We plan to work together on this.

When we think about our patients in a kind of language that WE deem potentially offensive to the uninitiated, who is to say that our own attitudes toward our patients are not affected by that language? --Cassandra Cook PhD, New York

Our notes [should reflect] that we listened, we observed, we thought, and we cared, which I contend is what each human being hopes for when putting their life in the hands of their physician. --Heather E Gantzer MD, doi:10.7326/M