Tips on How to Write an Open Note

Open Notes are 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, for commonly misunderstood words, abbreviations or phrases that could be interpreted as negative.

Consider Changing	Alternative Suggestion
Possibly Negative Wording	
Highly anxious, drug-abusing patient…	Patient uses injection drugs… Note: anxiety, if important, should be included.
Patient refuses to take his pills…	Patient has been non-adherent to therapy…or Patient has had difficulty tolerating
Smells of alcohol and intoxicated. Involved in MVA	Tests positive for alcohol, in setting of car accident
The GI service refuses to scope the patient	Continued discussion with GI about endoscopy timing. (The medical record is not a place for venting, even if the author is tired or frustrated).
Family members were supposed to come for a family meeting and did not show up…	Family meeting was cancelled since everyone could not attend.
Possibly Misunderstood Wording	
Morbidly obese	Severe Obesity per medical criteria. (Studies indicate patients often react positively to thoughtful discussion pointing to its relation to other conditions.
Patient was SOB	Patient was short of breath.
Legal or Other Proceedings	
Results of Forensic Nurse Exam (FNE)	FNE and similar notes that usually involve legal proceedings will not be automatically released to patients.
Domestic partner of mother of neonate is unaware that he is not the father…	Notes that are likely to be involved in legal or other proceedings are excluded from the federal requirement to share.
DSS to have unannounced visit with patient/family to change custody plan.	DSS consulted/involved in patient/family case.
Behavioral Health Wording	
Shows symptoms of major depression and has had thoughts of suicide…	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.
Patient is paranoid, but refuses to acknowledge this…	Patient states: "There is a transmitter in my tooth. It talks to me." Simple quotes without judgement can be effective.
Adolescent Care	
14-year-old patient has a positive pregnancy test	If a teen has their own MyChart account, they will see their notes. If parent proxy account exists, privacy protection blocking would also be potentially appropriate.
(Family member) contacted RN, stated he/she would visit, but did not visit during this shift/today.	"No family at bedside this shift/today" or "(Family Member) contacted RN via phone today. No family at bedside this shift/today."