Complaints

Policy

Opportunities are available for patients and other visitors to tell us, 'How we are doing" and we collect systematic patient experience feedback at least every 3 years.

The practice information brochure provides patients with information on how to provide feedback, including how to make a complaint.

We have a complaints resolution process which all staff can describe, and we also make the contact details for the state or territory health complaints agencies readily available to patients if we are unable to resolve their concerns ourselves.

Patients have a 'right to complain' and where possible patients and others are encouraged to raise any concerns directly with the practice team who are trained to make sure patients of the practice feel confident that any feedback or complaints made at the practice will be handled appropriately.

We believe most complaints can be responded to and resolved at the time the patient or other people such as carers (relative, friend other consumer) makes them known to us.

Under the *Health Services (Conciliation & Review) Act 1987* people with complaints should try to resolve them directly with the health service provider. If a satisfactory outcome is not achieved then the complaint can go directly to the Health Services Commissioner for action. The public may also call the Office of the Health Services Commissioner at any time concerning a query or to report a complaint.

Under national and state privacy laws: *Commonwealth Privacy Act - Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000* and *Victorian Health Records Act 2001*, this practice must provide and adhere to a complaints process for privacy issues and those related to the National Privacy Principles (NPPs)/Health Privacy Principles (HPPs).

All staff should be prepared to address complaints as they arise. Depending on the nature of the complaint and advice received from medical indemnity company, complaints are recorded and actioned, with a copy placed in the patient's medical record if related to patient care.

All clinical staff and the practice manger are aware of their professional and legal obligations regarding the mandatory reporting of unprofessional conduct.

Procedure

Patients and others have opportunities to register their complaints either verbally to staff, in writing (letter) or via our suggestion box. Patients should feel free to complain anonymously if desired.

All staff should be prepared to address complaints as they arise.
When receiving complaints staff should keep in mind the following in order to minimise further patient anxiety and hostility, possible leading to litigation:

- handle all complaints seriously, no matter how trivial they may seem.
- verbal complaints made in person should be addressed in a private area of the practice where possible.
- use tactful language when responding to complaints.
- don't blame other staff. Patients may not have all the facts or may distort them.
- address the patient's expectations regarding how they want the matter resolved.
- assure the patient that their complaint will be investigated and the matter not overlooked.
- offer the patients the opportunity to complete a formal complaint form. (They may accept or decline).
- document or Log all complaints and other relevant information and place this in the complaint folder so the designated complaints staff member is informed of the complaint. (even if you believe the matter has been resolved).
- alert the doctor or relevant clinical staff about disgruntled or hostile patients so he/she can diffuse the situation immediately.
- always inform the designated complaints officer if you become aware of any significant statements made by the patient or significant change in patient attitude. Often patients will tell staff when they are reluctant to tell the doctor.

The practice has identified staff members to be the team leaders responsible for feedback collection and analysis and handling complaints. In all our practices you can speak to the Centre Manager or Senior Receptionist. They coordinate the investigation and resolution of complaints.

- acknowledge the patients right to complain
- respond to complaints in writing within 2 working days
- telephone the patient to let him/her know that you are working on the problem
- respond to all complaints promptly in an open and constructive manner including an explanation and if appropriate an apology.
- work with the patient to resolve the complaint and communicate the outcome with the patient including any changes made as a result of the complaint.
- if the complaint is of a medical nature always refer it to a doctor. Refer procedure section 8 -"Management of potential medical defence claims".
- where a complaint is made against a staff member provide them with an opportunity to discuss the details in a private setting.

- as a routine contact the practices insurer when there is a complaint about a member of the clinical team in order to seek advice on resolving the complaint before any action is taken.
- ensure the complaint does not adversely affect the patents care.
- record the complaint, investigation, and actions, with a copy placed in the patient's medical record if related to patient care and the details also retained in the complaints file.
- ensure where appropriate complaints are reviewed at staff meetings. Analyse trends and discuss the methods of resolution. Other types of patient feedback - i.e. surveys, suggestion box are also reviewed at staff meetings
- a record of improvement made in response to patient feedback or complaints is maintained as evidence of quality assurance activity.
- where appropriate inform the patient/s about practice improvements made as a result of their input.

If the matter cannot be resolved advise the patient about how to contact the Health Complaints commissioner.

The National Privacy Commissioner is able to receive complaints concerning privacy issues. Complaints here will have a response within 28 days.

National Privacy Commissioner
Privacy hotline 1300 363 992.
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001
http://www.privacy.gov.au/complaints

Members of the public may make a notification to Australian Health practitioner regulation agency (AHPRA) http://www.ahpra.gov.au/ (AHPRA) about the conduct, health or performance of a practitioner or the health of a student. Practitioners, employers and education providers are all mandated by law to report notifiable conduct relating to a registered practitioner or student to AHPRA.