

Policy: How to provide feedback or complain

Complaints are inevitable in a medical practice, and we handle them with courtesy and empathy. We consider patient complaints a valuable source of feedback on our services, and we understand that ensuring patient satisfaction impacts their health outcomes.

To that end, we remind patients on our website, in brochures and posters how they may express compliments, complaints or suggestions about our service. This information covers:

- how responding to patient feedback is part of our commitment to quality care
- ways for patients to provide feedback/complaints and our methods of response
- external avenues for complaints, such as: Health Quality and Complaints (Australian list available on Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care website) and the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Verbal complaints are handled either by senior reception staff or the practice manager, who takes the patient to a quiet area to discuss their problem.

Written complaints are discussed with the practice manager and practice principal/s and a response, written or verbal will be prepared.

Our complaints handling process aims to minimise patient anxiety or hostility, which may lead to litigation. We follow these steps:

- Inform the staff member responsible for the complaint.
- For verbal complaints, escort the patient to a private area to discuss.
- Listen attentively, take notes and repeat key concerns to reassure the patient you understand their complaint.
- Assure the patient we will take their complaint seriously and thoroughly investigate it.
- Document the complaint in a memorandum and record details in the complaints register.
- Notify the patient's GP.
- Contact the patient within two working days after they lodge a complaint, and continue to update them during the investigation so they know we care.
- For a clinically-based complaint, contact the treating GP's medical defence organisation for advice.
- Decide on an appropriate resolution, and notify the patient.
- Document all communication with the patient, including written responses.

- Review the complaint at our next team meeting to discuss how it could have been prevented.

Procedure

Our practice manager and practice principals are responsible for investigating and resolving complaints. We actively encourage patients to communicate in person, or via post (or email - optional).

When receiving and responding to feedback or complaints from patients and others, we acknowledge and document the feedback and discuss it with the parties concerned. We will also discuss the outcome with the patient, log their response, and amend practice policies or procedures as required. This approach assists with our accreditation process.

Documenting complaints

Whether an informal or more formal response process has been followed, all complaints should be well documented and kept in a folder separate to patient medical records. If someone other than the patient makes a complaint, make sure you have the consent of the patient or their legally authorised representative before discussing the patient's treatment with them.