Complaints Handling Policy

We are committed to providing high quality care for all and will ensure that our patients and their representatives can seek advice, provide feedback or make a complaint about any aspect of our service.

This policy describes how we receive, manage, respond to and learn from complaints made about our service. All members of the team are expected to understand and follow this policy when dealing with a patient complaint.

The key aspects of this policy are that:

• Our patients know how to complain and are confident that we will take their complaint seriously

• We will investigate all complaints and will keep the patient informed of the findings of our investigation

• We will learn from any complaints, concerns and feedback that we receive and use these lessons to improve our service.

Information for patients

We believe that if a patient wishes to make a complaint or register a concern about any aspect of our service, they should find it easy to do so. Our code of practice for handling complaints, encourages patients to let us know when our service has not met their expectations and explains how we will investigate their complaint and keep them informed. Copies of our code are published on our website and kept in our policies folder at the practice, available on request.

Our approach to complaints

A complaint can be made by a patient of the practice or a person acting on their behalf if the patient is a child, has physical or mental incapacity, has consented to the person acting on their behalf, or has delegated authority to act on their behalf. A complaint can also be made by an individual who is, or is likely to be, affected by our actions, inactions, decisions or omissions. A complaint provides us with the opportunity to identify where our practice systems have failed and what we can do to improve our service. In dealing with a complaint, we will:

• Be open and transparent to ensure that all those involved understand the process and what to expect

• Acknowledge a complaint promptly

• Undertake evidence-based investigations

• Provide sympathetic responses within appropriate timeframes

• Identify the causes of complaints and act to prevent recurrence

• Learn lessons and implement change

• if the individual is a patient of the practice, ensure that their ongoing care is not adversely affected by the complaint.

Practice complaints process

Handling a complaint efficiently and sympathetically from the outset may encourage early resolution and avoid the need for a formal complaint process, involving investigation and formal reports. which is stressful and time-consuming for all concerned. When making a complaint, an individual usually wants an apology and to know what happened and why, what will be done to put it right, what action will be taken immediately and to prevent the cause for complaint happening again.

Receiving complaints

All members of the team must be able to receive a complaint or feedback (verbal or written) and deal with it appropriately. You should bear in mind, that the individual making the complaint may not refer to their concern as a complaint. The practice Complaints Manager, Catherine Turner, is responsible for dealing with all complaints received by the practice, unless immediate resolution is possible. The responsible person in charge of overseeing our complaints procedure and implementing changes where necessary is Catherine Turner.

Verbal complaints:

We will aim to:

Listen to what the individual is saying and be polite and considerate; avoid justifying the action that led to the complaint or being dismissive of the individual's concerns.

Where possible and, depending on the nature of the complaint, aim to resolve the matter as soon as it is received, make a note of the complaint and how we resolved it, and pass the information to the Complaints Manager.

If we are unable to resolve the complaint immediately, we will encourage the individual to speak with the Complaints Manager. If the Complaints Manager is not available, the available team member will take brief details of the complaint and arrange a convenient time for the Complaints Manager to contact the individual. The notes will be passed to the Complaints Manager and a copy given to the individual, together with a copy of the code of practice for handling patient complaints.

If the complaint requires an urgent response and one the Complaints Manager is not available, the complaint will be passed on to Julia Moyse or Geraldine Kirk, the reception team, so that this may be passed on to the Complaints Manager as soon as possible.

Written complaints:

All written complaints (by letter or email), will be passed immediately to the Complaints Manager.

Acknowledgement

The Complaints Manager will acknowledge the complaint in writing within 3 working days and enclose a copy of our code of practice for handling complaints. If a delay in acknowledging the complaint is anticipated, the reason for the delay will be explained to the individual.

The acknowledgement will include

• Confirmation that the matter will be investigated and that the individual will receive a report of the findings

- An offer to meet with the individual to discuss the complaint and gather information
- A description of how the complaint will be handles and who will be involved
- Anticipated timescales for the investigation and preparation of the report
- How the individual would like to be kept informed of progress
- Local organisations that can provide help.

The individual will be informed that they can obtain advice and information from the Independent Complaints Advocacy Team at the local NHS Healthwatch – see.healthwatch.co.uk/find-local-healthwatch for contact details

Investigation

The purpose of the investigation is to

- Understand what the complaint is about
- Establish what the individual would consider to be a satisfactory resolution
- Seek the views of other team members and seek suggestions on how to resolve the matter
- Identify other useful sources of information – for example, published research, suppliers

We aim for the investigation to be completed and for the individual to receive the report within 10 working days or, if the issue is complex, within 6 months. Where we anticipate a delay, we will explain this to the individual and provide an update on progress at least every 10 working days.

Response

Before providing a written response, we will invite the individual to a meeting to discuss the findings of our investigation. Our written response to the individual will:

- Address all the issues raised and demonstrate that each has been fully and fairly investigated
- Include an apology where something has gone wrong
- Explain our conclusions and any action that we have taken as a result or explain why no further action is needed
- Include details of how to contact the Dental Complaints Service if the individual remains dissatisfied

Records

The Complaints Manager keeps full records of all complaints, investigations and responses. These records are kept securely and not with the individual's clinical records (if they are a patient of the practice). These records include:

- The date a complaint was received, by who and how (verbally or in writing)
- Details of the complaint and the results of the investigation
- Copies of any communications and records of telephone conversations and meetings
- The outcome of the complaint and any action that we took as a result
- Correspondence between the patient and the practice.

Learning from complaints

We adopt a no-blame approach to complaints that we receive but recognise that all feedback provides an opportunity for us to develop and improve our service. As soon as possible after a complaint has been dealt with, we will ensure that those involved are given individual feedback. Where our investigations identify a need to improve or review our practice systems, we will encourage general discussion at practice meetings and seek suggestions for improvement. Any agreed changes will be kept under review. We will undertake ongoing monitoring of all complaints to identify trends and assess training requirements.