

5.13. Complaints

5.13.1. 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 three (3) years.

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

We have a complaints resolution process which all members of the practice team can describe, and we also make the contact details for the Victorian health complaints agency readily available to patients if we are unable to resolve their concerns.

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 all trained to make sure patients of the practice feel confident that any feedback or complaints made will be handled appropriately. We believe most complaints can be responded to and resolved at the time the patients or other people such as carers, relatives, friends, or other consumers make them known to our team.

Under national and Victorian privacy laws, our practice provides and adheres to a complaints process for privacy issues and those related to the *Australian Privacy Principles (APPs)*.

All members of our practice team are educated to be prepared to address complaints as they arise. Depending on the nature of the complaint and any advice received from our medical indemnity insurers where required, complaints are recorded and actioned with a copy placed in the patient’s health record if related to patient care.

All clinical and medical staff, as well as administration staff, are aware of the professional and legal obligations regarding the mandatory reporting of unprofessional conduct.

5.13.2. Procedure

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

All members of our practice team are educated to be prepared to address complaints as they arise.

When receiving complaints, our practice keeps in mind the following in order to minimise further patient anxiety and hostility:

- 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.
- Do not blame others; patients may not have all the facts or they 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 disregarded.
- Offer the person an opportunity to complete a formal complaint form (they may accept or decline).
- Document all complaints and other relevant information and place this in the complaint folder so the person designated to manage complaints is informed of the complaint (even if the matter appears to have been resolved).
- Alert the general practitioner about disgruntled or hostile patients so they can diffuse the situation immediately - often patients are reluctant to make a complaint directly to a general practitioner.
- Always inform the person designated to manage complaints if you become aware of any significant statements made by the patient or significant change in patient attitude.

The practice has appointed *practice manager Coco Gao* with designated responsibility for seeking, collecting, analysing, investigating, resolving and managing all feedback and complaints. Any investigation and resolution of complaints is undertaken using an open disclosure process, incorporating the following:

- Acknowledge the patient's right to complain.
- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint as soon as possible, but within two (2) working days using the *Acknowledgment of Complaint* letter template.
- Respond to all complaints as soon as reasonably practicable, but within thirty (30) days in an open and constructive manner including an explanation and if appropriate an apology.
- If a resolution of the matter is to take longer than thirty (30) days, an update of the resolution activities will be provided to the patient, with an anticipated revised timeframe for resolution.
- 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.
- As a routine, contact the practice's insurer when there is a complaint about a member of the medical or clinical team in order to seek advice on resolving the complaint before any action is taken (refer to **Section 8.7 – Management of potential medical defence claims**).
- Where a complaint is made against a practice team member, provide the team member with an opportunity to discuss the details in a private setting.
- Ensure the complaint does not adversely affect the patient's care.
- Record the complaint, investigation and actions in the dedicated complaints file and, if related to patient care, include a copy in the patient's health record.
- Ensure, where appropriate, complaints are reviewed at practice team meetings; analyse trends and discuss the methods of resolution.
- Review other types of patient feedback (i.e. feedback surveys, suggestion box) during practice team meetings.

- Keep a record of improvement(s) made in response to feedback or complaints.
- Where appropriate, inform the patient about practice improvements made as a result of their input.

If the matter cannot be resolved, the patient is advised about how to contact the external health complaints agency.

Victoria

Office of the Health Services Commissioner

Telephone: 1300 582 113

Web: www.health.vic.gov.au

Complaints that relate to privacy issues or concerns that cannot be resolved internally are to be directed to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC).

Office of the Australian Information Commissioner

Telephone: 1300 363 992

Postal Address: GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 2001

Web: www.oaic.gov.au

Members of the public may make a notification to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) - www.ahpra.gov.au - 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.