

Queensway Medical Centre

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

INTRODUCTION

This procedure sets out the Practice's approach to the handling of complaints and is intended as an internal guide who should be made readily available to all staff and also a summary setting out the approach to complaint handling should be available at reception for any patient requesting a copy. A patient leaflet outlining the complaints procedure is available at reception.

This procedure has been updated to reflect the changes in complaints procedures following the creation of NHS England in April 2013.

POLICY

The Practice will take reasonable steps to ensure that patients are aware of:

- The complaints procedure
- The time limit for resolution
- How it will be dealt with
- Who will deal with it?
- Their right of appeal
- Further action they can take if not satisfied
- The fact that any issues will not affect any ongoing treatment from the surgery and they will continue to be treated

PROCEDURE

Receiving of complaints

The Practice may receive a complaint made by, or (with his/her consent) on behalf of a patient, or former patient, who is receiving or has received treatment at the Practice, or:

(a) where the patient is a child:

- by either parent, or in the absence of both parents, the guardian or other adult who has care of the child;
- by a person duly authorised by a local authority to whose care the child has been committed under the provisions of the Children Act 1989;
- by a person duly authorised by a voluntary organisation by which the child is being accommodated

(b) where the patient is incapable of making a complaint, by a relative or other adult who has an interest in his/her welfare.

Period within which complaints should be made

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The period for making a complaint is normally:

- (a) 12 months from the date on which the event which is the subject of the complaint occurred; or
- (b) 12 months from the date on which the event which is the subject of the complaint comes to the complainant's notice.

Complaints should normally be resolved within 6 months. The practice standard will be 10 days for a response although every attempt will be made to respond to patients within three working days.

The Practice Manager is Queensway Medical Centre's Complaints Manager and has the discretion to extend the time limits if the complainant has good reason for not making the complaint sooner, or where it is still possible to properly investigate the complaint despite extended delay.

When considering an extension to the time limit it is important that the Practice Manager takes into consideration that the passage of time may prevent an accurate recollection of events by the clinician concerned or by the person bringing the complaint. The collection of evidence, Clinical Guidelines or other resources relating to the time when the complaint event arose may also be difficult to establish or obtain. These factors may be considered as suitable reason for declining a time limit extension.

Action upon receipt of a complaint

- It is always better to try and deal with the complaint at the earliest opportunity and often it can be concluded at that point.
- If it is not possible or the outcome is not satisfactory the patient should be asked to put it in writing. This ensures that each side are well aware of the issues for resolution. If the patient does refuse to put it in writing then it is advisable for the surgery to put it in writing and check that the patient is happy with the detail of the complaint.
- On receipt of a written complaint an acknowledgement should be sent confirming receipt and saying that a further response will be sent within 10 days following an investigation of the issues.
- If it is not possible to conclude any investigations within the 10 days then the patient should be updated with progress and possible time scales.
- A full investigation should take place with written notes and a log of the progress being made.
- It may be that outside sources will need to be contacted and if that is the case then a patient consent form will need to be signed to make such a request.

Unreasonable Complaints

Where a complainant becomes aggressive or, despite effective complaint handling, unreasonable in their promotion of the complaint, some or all of the following formal provisions will apply and will be communicated to the patient:

- The complaint will be managed by one named individual at senior level who will be the only contact for the patient
- Contact will be limited to one method only (e.g. in writing)
- Place a time limit on each contact
- The number of contacts in a time period will be restricted
- A witness will be present for all contacts
- Repeated complaints about the same issue will be refused
- Only acknowledge correspondence regarding a closed matter, not respond to it
- Set behaviour standards
- Return irrelevant documentation

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- Keep detailed records

Final Response

This will include:

- A clear statement of the issues, investigations and the findings, giving clear evidence-based reasons for decisions if appropriate
- Where errors have occurred, explain these fully and state what will be done to put these right, or prevent repetition
- A focus on fair and proportionate the outcomes for the patient, including any remedial action or compensation
- A clear statement that the response is the final one, or that further action or reports will be send later
- An apology or explanation as appropriate
- A statement of the right to escalate the complaint, together with the relevant contact detail
- It should also advise on the next step in the process if the complainant is still not satisfied. That would normally be an offer of a meeting with a GP and/or Practice Manager to try further reconciliation.
- After that the patient can contact the local PALS (Patient Advisory Liaison Service) who would arbitrate between both sides to seek a mutual agreement. This often takes time but can be very helpful having a third person review
- If at that point resolution is still not achieved then either side can refer the matter to the Health Commissioner.

Annual Review of Complaints

The practice will establish an annual complaints report, incorporating a review of complaints received, along with any learning issues or changes to procedures which have arisen. This will be presented at a Quality Improvement meeting and key learnings will be shared with the wider practice team at Practice Learning Events.

The review will include:

- Statistics on the number of complaints received
- Justified / unjustified analysis
- Known referrals to the Ombudsman
- Subject matter / categorisation / clinical care
- Learning points
- Methods of complaints management
- Any changes to procedure, policies or care which have resulted

Alternatives to making a complaint to the practice

In the first instance, we recommend that any complaints about primary care services are made to the practice following the above procedures. It is understood that sometimes, the complainant may not feel comfortable raising their complaint directly. For this reason, an alternative method is in place which is by writing to:

NHS England
PO Box 16738
Redditch
B97 9PT

Tel: 0300 311 22 33 (Mon-Fri 8.00-6.00)

Email: england.contactus@nhs.net

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Complaints regarding commissioning decisions/issues e.g. individual patient funding requests and continuing healthcare complaints should be directed to:

Customer Care Team
Lancashire Commissioning Support Unit
Lancashire Business Park
Jubilee House
Centurion Way
Leyland
PR26 6TR

Tel: 0800 032 2424

Email: customer.care@lancashirecsu.nhs.uk

If the practice has previously responded to a complaint but the complainant remains unsatisfied with the response, the complainant has the option of taking their complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, who can be contacted as follows:

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
Millbank Tower
Millbank
London
SW1P 4QP

Tel: 0345 015 4033 (Mon-Fri 8.30-5.30)

Email: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk

Confidentiality

All complaints must be treated in the strictest confidence

Where the investigation of the complaint requires consideration of the patient's medical records, the Practice Manager must inform the patient or person acting on his/her behalf if the investigation will involve disclosure of information contained in those records to a person other than the Practice or an employee of the Practice.

The Practice Manager will maintain a hardback log of all complaints and copies of all correspondence relating to complaints, but such records must be kept separate from patients' medical records.

Reviewed by: Jenny Naden

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Next Review Date: June 2017