

Joint statement on handling feedback and complaints in the dental practice

Contemporary expectations of healthcare are now more closely related to the expectations people have about commercial services.

For dentistry, this means that people receiving dental care are much more willing to voice their opinions, offer feedback about their experience, or make a complaint about dental treatments and dental services.

As a result, dental practitioners are likely, at some point in their career, to receive feedback or complaints about some aspect of the treatment or the service they have provided.

This joint statement sets out what we believe to be the principles of good feedback and complaints handling in the dental practice. These are not new requirements or procedures to be followed, but rather a best practice guide to handling feedback and complaints at your practice.

For this document, we make use of the following definitions:

Feedback – feedback is an opinion, whether invited or spontaneous, that can be positive, negative or neutral.

Complaint – a complaint or concern is an expression of dissatisfaction about an act, omission or decision of the provider, either spoken or written, and whether justified or not, which requires a response.

The above definitions should be considered within the context of ‘no issue is too big to be a concern, and no issue is too small to be a complaint.’

Processing a complaint through your practice’s own complaints procedure is usually the best way to solve the problem. However, if the matter is deemed serious enough to indicate that a dental professional may not be fit to work in their role, it should be referred to the General Dental Council.¹

When managed well, resolving complaints at the practice level is better for all concerned, and can avoid the unnecessary escalation of concerns because the individual reporting them has become dissatisfied with the complaints handling process.

If you are unsure about how to respond to a complaint, consider involving your defence organisation in drafting your response.

No healthcare professional should be fearful of receiving feedback or complaints. When handled well, both feedback and complaints can provide valuable insight into performance and be used for informed service improvement.

¹ General Dental Council. (2017). How to report a dental professional to us. Available at: <https://www.gdc-uk.org/api/files/HowtoReportEnglishfinal1.pdf> [Accessed 27.11.17]

Making a complaint about dental services: six principles of good complaint handling

The following principles set out what patients expect from you if they would like to provide feedback or raise a concern:

1 All of your feedback is important to us

- All feedback is welcomed, such as what we did well, what we could do better, or any other feedback
- We will use your feedback to help us improve, and we will show you how we have learned
- You can use our complaints procedure to provide feedback. If you don't want to do this, speak to a member of staff

2 We want to make it easy for you to raise a concern or complain, if you need to

- Information about our complaints procedure is easy to find, without you having to ask
- You can write to us or tell us in person
- We will take your complaint seriously
- Our complaints information also tells you how to raise a complaint about us with another organisation

3 We follow a complaints procedure and keep you informed

- We will tell you who is dealing with your complaint and when to expect a response
- We will keep you informed of the progress of your complaint, including information on any delays
- You should feel confident we are following our complaints procedure

4 We will try to answer all your questions and any concerns you raise

- It should be clear to you what happened, and why
- Our response should be empathetic in tone and coordinated
- We will deal with your complaint in the time we said we would

5 We want you to have a positive experience of making a complaint

- You should feel we have followed a clear procedure in the time we said we would
- You should not be treated differently if you complain
- You understand how the outcome of your complaint was reached
- You feel you could raise a complaint again if needed, and could recommend our procedure to others
- You feel we have listened to you and have acted in a fair way
- You know what further help is available if you are unhappy with the way we have handled your complaint

6 Your feedback helps us to improve our service

- We are learning all the time from your feedback and complaints
- We show you how your feedback and complaints are listened to and acted upon
- All members of our dental team are committed to improving the service we provide

The principles of good feedback and complaints handling for dental patients were developed jointly by the following organisations:

- Association of Dental Administrators and Managers
- Association of Dental Groups
- British Association of Dental Nurses
- British Association of Dental Therapists
- British Dental Association
- British Orthodontic Society
- British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy
- Bupa Dental Care
- Care Quality Commission
- CFC Underwriting
- CODE
- Dental Complaints Service
- DDU
- Dental Protection
- Dental Technologists Association
- Department of Health and Social Care
- General Dental Council
- Health Education England
- LDC Confederation
- MDDUS
- mydentist
- NHS Digital
- NHS England
- Orthodontic National Group
- Orthodontic Technicians Association
- Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman
- Simplyhealth
- Society of British Dental Nurses

The following resources have been developed to support dental professionals to uphold the principles:

- Making a complaint about dental services – patient leaflet
- Making a complaint about dental services – poster
- Making a complaint about dental services: how the six principles of good complaint handling relates to the CQC's inspection framework and the GDC's *Standards for the Dental Team*

The above resources are available to download from the websites of the contributing organisations and hard copies are available on request.