

Strategies to Prevent and Respond to Patient Complaints

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In spite of our best efforts, we will not be able to please all patients all of the time. All patients have the potential to complain. When we work collaboratively toward managing or exceeding patient expectations, a substantial number of patient complaints can be averted. What do most patients want from a medical practice?

- Access
- Clear communications
- Skilled clinicians
- Respect
- Healing
- Empathy

Risk Reduction Strategies for Complaints

RESPOND

Respond promptly to the patient's concern about care.

LISTEN

Allow the person reasonable, uninterrupted time to vent the concern. Avoid being defensive by responding with a calm and personable approach.

ADVISE

Advise the patient that you are pleased to be informed about the concern as it could help you to improve the practice.

CLARIFY THE CONCERN

Ask questions. Then re-state the situation to show understanding. The patient may be angry at a situation over which he has no control or does not understand.

BE EMPATHETIC

It is appropriate to express kindness and empathy.

APOLOGIZE

"I am sorry that we did not meet your expectations. What can I do to make the situation better?" Explain what you can and cannot do for the patient/situation. Often times, a staff team member or the physician has the power to take some action on the patient's behalf. Also,

a meeting can be arranged in the office if the patient prefers. Keep the person informed-if you make a promise, keep it.

TAKE ACTION AND DOCUMENT

A brief factual note in the patient's record is sufficient. Use quotes. Include an action plan and follow-up.

- Refer to the sample policy located on the CMIC website (www.cmic.biz) under Loss Prevention Resources.

Links by State for posting to advise patients as to how to file a complaint with the DPH about care:

Connecticut

www.ct.gov/dph

Massachusetts

www.mass.gov/eohhs/topics

www.mass.gov/massmedboard

New Hampshire

www.dhhs.nh.gov/dphs

Rhode Island

www.health.RI.gov/complaints - about healthcare professionals and facilities.

<http://www.health.ri.gov/partners/boards/medicallicensureanddiscipline/>

Pennsylvania

<http://www.health.pa.gov/>

DC

<http://doh.dc.gov/service/complaints-doh> - for licensed professionals and facilities

New Jersey

<http://www.nj.gov/health/healthfacilities/hotlines.shtml> - to file a complaint against a facility; complaint hotline available as well: 1-800-792-9770.

For complaints about a practitioner: www.njconsumeraffairs.gov/