

How to Handle Patient Complaints

Complaints may arise under a variety of circumstances in any clinical or homecare setting. Your staff's best course of action is a coherent, concise response that preserves patient confidence and satisfaction, as follows:

Listen

Stop what you are doing, and give your undivided attention to the patient. If you are on the phone, make appropriate responses so the patient knows you are listening. Do not argue with the patient or interrupt with explanations. Listen without attributing fault.

Empathize

Place yourself in the patient's place. Offer a statement of empathy (e.g., "I'm sorry that ...," or "I understand that ..."). Do so without agreeing to guilt on your part or on behalf of the practice. Extend understanding without agreement.

Inquire

Gain as much information as you can about the problem. This will help you decide the best way to handle the complaint. Be sure the patient knows you take his or her concern seriously.

Act

Suggest solutions you can perform. Get the patient's approval on the recommended action (e.g., "I will contact ... and ask her to get back to you"). If no immediate action is apparent, assure the patient that an appropriate manager will be informed and that he or she can expect a response.

Conclude

Thank the patient for taking time to notify you of the complaint. Stress that patient satisfaction is a critical component of quality patient care in your practice.

Document

Give any patient and/or family member with a complaint an opportunity to document it. Create a simple form that contains the patient's name and date of the complaint, the patient's statement of the problem, the staff member's statement or response, a description of the action taken, and the staff member's signature with a date.

The form both assures patients that their complaints are taken seriously *and* provides documentation that can help forestall potential problems and educate staff on how to prevent future similar complaints.