

Complaints Policy

Overview

- We aim to provide a service that meets the needs of our clients and we strive for a high standard of care;
- We welcome suggestions from clients, their family members who care for them, and from our clinicians and staff about the safety and quality of care we provide;
- We are committed to an effective and fair complaints system; and
- We support a culture of openness and willingness to learn from incidents, including complaints.

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Procedures

1. Our policy

Clients and their families are encouraged to provide suggestions, compliments, concerns and complaints, either verbally, in a letter, or through the *Client feedback form*.

All complainants are treated with respect, sensitivity and confidentiality.

All complaints are handled without prejudice or assumptions about how minor or serious they are. The emphasis is on resolving the problem.

Clients, their families, clinicians and staff can make complaints on a confidential basis or anonymously if they wish, and be assured that their identity will be protected.

2. Everyone's responsibility

All clinicians and staff are expected to encourage clients and their families to provide feedback about the service, including complaints, concerns, suggestions and compliments.

Clinicians and staff are expected to attempt resolution of complaints and concerns at the point of service, wherever possible and within the scope of their role and responsibility.

Clients and their families are strongly encouraged to express their complaints or concerns directly to the staff so that the staff have the opportunity to resolve those issues.

3. If the complaint is not resolved

Complaints that are not resolved at the point of service, or that are received in writing and require follow up, are regarded as formal complaints.

If the complaint is not resolved at the point of service, clinicians and staff are expected to acknowledge to the complainant that a formal complaint has been received and will be acted on. This may take the form of prompt personal contact with the complainant, or contact with the complainant soon after the problem has been addressed.

4. Assessing resolution options

Formal complaints are normally resolved by direct negotiation with the complainant, but some complaints are better resolved with the assistance of an independent authority.

The Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner is an appropriate independent authority that clients and their families may approach if the complaints could not be resolved by direct negotiation.

5. Timeframes

Formal complaints are acknowledged in writing or in person within 48 hours.

6. Records and privacy

Complaints records will be maintained in a complaints and client feedback register, with records of informal feedback and formal complaints.

Personal information in individual complaints is kept confidential and is only made available to those who need it to deal with the complaint.

Individual complaints files are kept in a secure filing cabinet and in a restricted access section of the computer system.

Clients are provided with access to their clinical records [in accordance with the privacy policy]. Family members and others requesting access to a client's clinical records as part of resolving a complaint are provided with access only if the client has provided authorisation [in accordance with the privacy policy].

7. Open disclosure and fairness

Complainants are initially provided with an explanation of what happened, based on the known facts.

At the conclusion of an inquiry or investigation, the complainant and relevant clinicians and staff are provided with all established facts, the causal factors contributing to the incident and any recommendations to improve the service, and the reasons for these decisions.

8. Investigation and resolution

The person investigating the complaint seeks to identify what happened, the underlying causes of the complaint and preventative strategies.

Information is gathered from:

- talking to staff directly involved;
- listening to the complainant's views;
- reviewing clinical records and other records; and
- reviewing relevant policies, standards or guidelines.

9. Monitoring and evaluation

The principal consultant continuously monitors the amount of time taken to resolve complaints, whether recommended changes have been acted on and whether satisfactory outcomes have been achieved.

The principal consultant annually reviews the complaints management system to evaluate if the complaints policy is being complied with and how it measures up against the indicators in the *Better Practice Guidelines on Complaints Management for Health Care Services* (available from the Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner).