

Carryduff Surgery - Practice Complaints Procedure

This Practice-based Complaints Procedure is in accord with the Department of Health 'Guidance in relation to the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure' (Updated April 2023): the HSC Complaints Procedure.

Its purpose is to address issues of dissatisfaction raised by patients regarding their treatment and care; provide explanations and, where appropriate, offer apologies; learn from mistakes and improve services for the Practice's patients; provide complainants with an explanation of the circumstances surrounding an adverse event or an issue or concern.

In the event that a patient wishes to make a complaint, the steps detailed below will be taken. The Practice will endeavour to deal with patients' complaints in a positive and constructive way and to learn from them.

Definition of a Complaint

Under the HSC Complaints Procedure a complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction that requires a response. Complainants may not always use the word 'complaint'. They may offer a comment or suggestion that can be extremely helpful. It is important to recognise those comments that are really complaints and need to be handled as such.

How to complain

Complaints can be made in person, by telephone or in writing.

Timescales

Under the HSC Complaints Procedure complaints should normally be made within 6 months of the complainant becoming aware of the cause for complaint, or within 12 months of the date of the event, whichever is the earlier.

Complaining on behalf of someone else

The Practice will ensure strict adherence to the rule of medical confidentiality. If a complaint is made on behalf of someone else, the Practice will need to know that the respective patient has given their permission for the complaint to be made. Written consent from the patient concerned will be required, unless they do not have capacity to provide consent (because of illness) or are deceased. In the case of the latter the complainant must identify that the service user is deceased that they are the appropriate person to act as representative of the deceased; clarifying their relationship to the deceased.

Complaints Manager

The Practice Manager Heather Neill has been appointed as Complaints Manager, or, in her absence, Assistant Practice Manager Emma Hunter (contact the Practice on 028 90812211). She will be informed immediately when any member of staff within the Practice receives a complaint.

Receipt of a complaint

1. A written complaint will be directed to the Practice Manager. If the complaint is received verbally this will be recorded and passed onto the Practice Manager. The complaint will be acknowledged, in

writing or electronically, within 3 working days and the acknowledgement will indicate how the complaint will be handled and the timescale for investigation and response, usually 10 working days. A copy of the Practice Complaints leaflet will be provided.

2. The Practice Manager will inform the Partners as soon as possible about the complaint and consideration will be given whether it is appropriate for the complaint to be dealt with by the in-house procedure and whether the complaint is organisational or clinical.
3. If the in-house procedure is applicable an investigator should be appointed:
 - a) Partner for clinical matters
 - b) Practice Manager/Assistant PM for administration and other matters.
4. When the complaint is organisational, the Practice Manager (or Assistant Practice Manager) will undertake a Preliminary investigation to determine whether an apology and an assurance that action will be taken to prevent a recurrence would resolve the complaint at this stage. As soon as practicable, the case will be discussed with a member of the Practice against whom the complaint has been made to establish their recollection of events. If the complaint has been made about a Practice procedure, the Practice Manager will deal with the complaint at this stage as appropriate.
5. With a clinical complaint, a Partner will undertake a Preliminary investigation by speaking with the complainant. This action is to establish the seriousness and complexity of the complaint and, if necessary, to obtain further details. Again a telephone call followed by an apology may resolve the complaint. If not, the Partner should do two things:
 - a) As soon as practicable, the complaint will be discussed with the member of the Practice against whom the complaint has been made to establish their recollection of events, as well as an examination of the records being undertaken.
 - b) The complainant may be invited to the Practice to discuss the matter further if they so wish. If as a result of this, a meeting does take place with the complainant, they will be advised of their right to be accompanied by a friend or relative to the meeting. It may also be appropriate to have the partner or clinical staff member against whom the complaint is made present also (with the prior knowledge and consent of the complainant). The Investigating Partner will normally be accompanied by the Practice Manager. A record of the meeting will be taken and shared with the complainant for comments on factual accuracy.
6. Details of the investigation and the outcome will be made known to the complainant in writing within 10 working days of the complaint having been received, or as soon as possible thereafter. If the timescale cannot be met, the complainant will be advised of the reason for the delay and when they are likely to receive a response.
7. To conclude the process, the following must be satisfied, the complainant must be satisfied that he/she has an assurance that the complaint has been recorded and will receive attention and that the results will be reported to the partnership together with suggestions for preventing such a situation arising again.
8. Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG). Under the HSC Complaints Procedure, patients can raise their complaint with the SPPG. This may be because they feel uncomfortable approaching immediate staff or the Practice. The SPPG cannot investigate complaints, but can act as an 'honest broker' or intermediary between the complainant and the practice to help resolve the complaint. The

SPPG can be contacted at: - Complaints Office, SPPG, Department of Health, 12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast, BT2 8BS; complaints.sppg@hscni.net or telephone (028) 9536 3893.

9. NI Public Services Ombudsman. Within 2 weeks of the day on which the internal complaints process is exhausted, the complainant must be advised in writing of the following:-
- (a) That the internal complaints process has been exhausted
 - (b) That the complainant may refer the matter to the NIPSO if they remain dissatisfied with the response. This referral must be made within 6 months of completion of the internal complaints process.
 - (c) How to contact the NIPSO

The Ombudsman will normally only take on an investigation after all attempts to resolve the complaint at practice level have been explored and fully exhausted. The ombudsman can be contacted at: -

NI Public Services Ombudsman
Progressive House
33 Wellington Place
BELFAST
BT1 6HN

Tel: Freephone: 0800 34 34 24/ 02890 233821
Freepost NIPSO
Email: nipso@nipso.org.uk

Patient and Client Council

The Patient and Client is an independent body that can assist people in making complaints. They cannot investigate complaints, but can act as an advocate for patients, provide assistance in drafting letters of complaint and accompany complainants to meetings. The Council can be contacted at: Patient and Client Council: Info@pcc-ni.net; or Freephone: 0800 917 0222.

Patients should be aware that the SPPG requires anonymised copies of all written complaints and their respective responses to be forwarded to them.

Complaints and Legal action

The HSC Complaints Procedure cannot address questions of negligence or provide compensation. If a complainant's initial communication is through a solicitor's letter, it should not be inferred that the complainant has decided to take formal legal action. However, if the complainant has instigated formal legal action, or advised that he or she intends to do so, the complaints process should cease. The complainant should be notified of this in writing.

Written details of this procedure are available from:

- The Practice Manager (90812211 at the surgery)
- The Practice Website (www.carryduffsurgery.co.uk)
- Or from the Practice Reception

The Practice will undertake annual audits of patients' complaints to enable feedback to develop guidelines and procedures to reduce the incidence of complaints.