



FACT SHEET: MANAGING PATIENT FEEDBACK

What the RACGP Standards say

Criterion 2.1.2 of the RACGP *Standards for general practices* (4th edition) (the *Standards*) says 'our practice seeks and responds to patients' feedback on their experience of our practice to support our quality improvement activities'. The related indicators are designed to help general practices use patient feedback to manage risk and achieve incremental improvements to their systems and health services.

This fact sheet applies to Indicator A which deals with general feedback and Indicator B which deals with complaints resolution. The fact sheet needs to be read in conjunction with the RACGP *Standards for general practices* (4th edition).

► Indicator A: Our practice has a process for seeking and responding to feedback from patients and other people and our practice team can describe this process.

Practices need to have a mechanism for seeking and responding to patient feedback. This requirement is consistent with the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights and is also important for involving patients in day-to-day quality improvement activities. Usually, this mechanism would be outlined in the practice information sheet and by practice staff as required (see the *Standards* Criterion 1.2.1 Practice information).

Practices can derive significant benefits from a partnership approach to quality improvement. For example, practices may invite patients to provide feedback on proposed improvements such as a new system for providing pathology results. This approach is a good way to involve patients in quality activities and has the added benefit of paving the way for a smooth transition to new systems or services.

Similarly, patients should be encouraged to raise any concerns about the practice with the practice team directly and attempts should be made to resolve such concerns within the practice. Usually this is the easiest and most effective way to sort out problems.

Suggested steps for addressing a patient's concerns

It is important for practice teams to:

- Act promptly (think days not weeks)
- Decide which member of the practice team is best placed to address the patient's concerns
- Make a time for that person to hold a discussion with the patient involved
- Treat the patient as an individual and try to understand their perspective
- Listen carefully and respectfully and endeavour to summarise the essence of the patient's concerns so they know their issues have been heard
- Ask the patient what would resolve their concerns
- Communicate your perspective and try to resolve the patient's concerns
- Keep all documentation relating to a patient's concerns or complaint separate to the patient's health record (eg in the practice event register)
- Analyse concerns and complaints expressed by patients and implement quality improvements to minimise their recurrence.



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Unable to resolve a patient's concerns?

If members of the practice team are unable to resolve a patient's concerns, the practice itself can seek help from the Health Complaints Commission in their State or Territory (see Appendix 1). Alternatively, the practice can refer patients to the local Health Complaints Commission. Each Commission makes available free information brochures outlining the help available. Staff members at each of these State and Territory Commissions are specially trained to provide impartial guidance to health consumers and health providers alike. They can also conciliate between patients and health service providers, including general practices, where patients have expressed concerns about issues such as:

- Unsatisfactory care
- Privacy and/or access to their own health information
- Communication issues
- Lack of respect, dignity or privacy
- Negligent or unprofessional behaviour
- Unsatisfactory interpreting or translating services.

The services provided by Health Complaints Commissioners are free and confidential.

► Indicator B: Our practice has a complaints resolution process and makes contact information for the state/territory health complaints agencies readily available to patients if we are unable to resolve their concerns ourselves.

Complaints are important because they enable general practices to understand their weaknesses and take action to initiate quality improvements.

Suggested steps for addressing a patient's complaint

If a patient makes a complaint to the practice, it is important for practice teams to:

- Act promptly (think days not weeks)
- Acknowledge receipt of the complaint
- Decide which member of the practice team is best placed to address the patient's concerns
- Make a time for that person to hold a discussion with the patient involved
- Treat the patient as an individual and try to understand their perspective
- Listen carefully and respectfully and endeavour to summarise the essence of the patient's concerns so they know their issues have been heard
- Ask the patient what would resolve their concerns
- Communicate your perspective and try to resolve the patient's concerns
- Keep all documentation relating to a patient's concerns or complaint separate to the patient's health record (eg in the practice event register)
- Analyse concerns and complaints expressed by patients and implement quality improvements to minimise their recurrence.

Practices are encouraged to be proactive in seeking advice and assistance from the local Office of the Health Complaints Commissioner as required.

General practices need to be aware that:

- Patients have the right to raise concerns or make complaints
- Most patients don't like to complain
- Most patients who have expressed concerns or made complaints don't want other people to suffer the same problems.



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Contact your insurer for advice

General practices should make a habit of contacting the relevant insurer for advice when a patient expresses concerns or makes a complaint about healthcare provided by the practice. Such advice should be sought at the outset of the problem solving process. Insurers will be able to help the practice map out a timely plan for managing a patient's concerns/complaint and direct the practice towards legal advice where necessary.

Resources

- RACGP *Standards for general practices* (4th edition) at www.racgp.org.au/standards
- Medical Board of Australia *Good Medical Practice: A Code of Conduct for Doctors in Australia* at www.medicalboard.gov.au/codes-and-guidelines.aspx
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care *Better practice guidelines on complaints management for health care services* at www.safetyandquality.gov.au
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare *Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights* at www.safetyandquality.gov.au
- RACGP Guide *Using near misses to improve the quality of care for your patients* is available at www.racgp.org.au/publications/orders.
- RACGP *Regaining trust after an adverse event: an education module on managing adverse events in general practice* is available at: <http://www.racgp.org.au/Content/NavigationMenu/PracticeSupport/Runningapractice/Patientsafetyinitiatives/Currentprojects/RegainingTrustWorkbook.pdf>
- RACGP education module *Being human, being safer* on human factors in general practice is a useful resource for all members of the practice team and is available at: <http://www.racgp.org.au/safety/beinghuman>
- RACGP education module *Thinking safety, being safer* is designed to help all members of the practice team understand and utilise 'near miss' analysis to improve the quality of patient care and is available at: <http://www.racgp.org.au/safety/thinkingsafety>.

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Appendix 1

State and Territory Health Complaints Commissions

Australian Capital Territory

ACT Human Rights Commission
12 Moore Street, Canberra City, ACT 2600
Telephone: 02 6205 2222 Fax: 02 6207 1034
Website: www.hrc.act.gov.au

NB In the ACT it is an offence not to provide information for consumers about their right to complain to the practice and to the Commissioner. This requirement can be met by displaying a poster which is made available by the Health Services Commissioner.

New South Wales

Health Care Complaints Commission
Level 13, 323 Castlereagh Street, Sydney 2000
Telephone: 02 9219 7444 Fax: 02 9281 4585
Website: www.hccc.nsw.gov.au

Northern Territory

Health & Community Services Complaints Commission
12th floor, NT House, 22 Mitchell Street, Darwin 0800
Telephone: 08 8999 1818 Fax: 08 8999 1828
Website: www.hcsc.nt.gov.au

Queensland

Health, Quality & Complaints Commission
Level 17, 53 Albert Street, BRISBANE, QLD 4000
Telephone: 07 3120 5999 Fax: 07 3120 5998
Website: www.hqcc.qld.gov.au

South Australia

The Office of the Health and Community Services Complaints Commission
PO Box 199 Rundle Mall, SA 5000
Telephone: 08 8226 8666 Country SA 1800 232 007 Fax: 08 8226 8620
Website: www.hcsc.sa.gov.au

Tasmania

Health Complaints Commission Tasmania
Ground floor, 99 Bathurst Street, Hobart, TAS 7000
Telephone: 03 6233 6217 Fax: 03 6233 8966
Website: www.healthcomplaints.tas.gov.au

Victoria

Office of the Health Services Commissioner
30th floor, 570 Bourke St, Melbourne 3000
Telephone: 03 8601 5216 Fax: 03 8601 5219
Website: www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc

Western Australia

Health and Disability Services Complaints Office
Level 17, St Martins Tower, 44 St George St, Perth 6000
Telephone: 08 9323 0600 Fax: 08 9221 3675
Website: www.hadsco.wa.gov.au