Complaints Scenarios

- Phones
- Referral
- Poor Nursing Standards
- Rude Receptionist
- Delay In Diagnosis
- Charges For Health Jabs

These scenarios are designed to support the ‘Complaints Clinic’ training package. They are designed for use primarily with a group. However, they can be used equally well by individuals.

In each scenario, you will see a transcript of a complaint. This is either made on the phone or face to face in the surgery. (One scenario is a written complaint.)

The transcript is followed by a number of questions for the group to consider and discuss. The questions are not exhaustive and the scenario might well prompt additional issues or questions for you to discuss.

They are designed to get you to think about typical issues that might happen in your Practice to really understand what the Patient is unhappy about.

Once you have discussed the issues and agreed on the outcome and how you would handle this, why not role play the complaint and use the skills from the programme to practice handling each complaint?

Good luck.
1. Phones

“I tried ringing yesterday for an appointment in the morning but was told they had all gone and to call again in the afternoon. This I did and was told by the Receptionist to call at 8.30 am when you open as you can’t take bookings for the following day. Called on the dot of 8.30 and the line is engaged. It remains constantly engaged for the next 5 minutes. I then get through, and put on hold and have to listen to piped music. When I do eventually get to speak to a human being, all appointments for today have gone – not even just with my doctor, but everyone. I’m told to call again tomorrow morning.

This is wholly unacceptable. I don’t have an urgent need but when I called last week to book an appointment ahead of time knowing I was going to be home from work, I was told I have to book on the day. How is this possible if you can’t get through on the phone and when you do all the appointments have gone?

The bright spark on Reception then suggested I come down to the surgery first thing in person to book. When I asked if this guaranteed an appointment on that day, I was told only if the queue isn’t too long and the appointments haven’t been taken up by callers on the phone!

This is a ridiculous situation and needs addressing. Everyone is always complaining and you do nothing about it. You seem to forget we are your customers – if I treated my clients this way I’d have no business left!”

Key questions to consider:-

- What is the main complaint?
- What does she want you to do?
- How can you help her to resolve the issue to her satisfaction?
- What changes can be brought to bear to avoid this in future?
2. Referral

“I brought my daughter in to see the doctor last month when she was home from University and he said she needs to have her tonsils removed. He promised to write to the Hospital so that this can be arranged whilst she is on holiday and has time to recover before returning to University.

I called the Hospital last week as they hadn’t been in touch with an appointment and they informed me they have no details about my daughter and no referral. I telephoned the surgery to chase up the referral and was told that due to confidentiality, they weren’t able to tell me anything about the referral and you had to speak with my daughter.

I got her to call the surgery and after something of a tussle in confirming her identity, one of the Reception staff said they’d speak with the secretary. We checked again today and there is still no letter from the surgery received by the Hospital. Once again, no one will speak to me about this – my daughter gave her authority over the phone last time that she was happy for me to discuss the referral with you and yet no note has been made of this and there is a constant lack of communication and co-operation. I don’t care who does it, we just want this letter sent straight away and copied to us so that we know it has gone and then we can get an appointment sorted. Time is moving on now and my daughter continues to be ill and you aren’t helping the matter. You say I can’t speak with the doctor but I will be taking this further as it is completely inefficient.”

Key questions to consider:-

- Who is at fault here?
- What is the main crux of her complaint – the late referral / confidentiality / delay / being passed from pillar to post?
- What can you do to explain the situation and how you are going to resolve it for her?
- What should you do to follow up this complaint to ensure she isn’t lost in the system again?
3. Poor Nursing Care

“I came in for a blood test with your nurse this morning and am disgusted by her attitude. She was abrupt, uncaring, didn’t tell me what was happening and frightened me. I don’t like blood tests and had told her so but she told me not to be so silly – she didn’t bother to tell me what was happening, just got on with the job. If she doesn’t like people she shouldn’t be doing her job!

She asked what the blood test was for – how am I supposed to know! The doctor filled out the form but she said she didn’t know why he had asked for something or the other. I assume he knows what he is doing and why he wants them. What’s the point of asking me? I want to know what you are going to do about her bad manners and rudeness.”

Key questions to consider:-

- Why is she angry?
- This is a clinical matter – how can you help?
- What can you do to ensure this doesn’t happen again?
- Is this a one off “bad day” or is there a pattern of complaints?
4. Rude Receptionist

“How can you employ such rude people – I was standing in a queue last week at the surgery waiting to pick up a prescription and one of your receptionists – the grey haired lady – was speaking to a patient over the desk. The lady was obviously quite deaf and not understanding what was being said to her and your employee was getting very agitated with her. She kept repeating that the District Nurse wasn’t around and so no one could help – the patient obviously was having trouble understanding what she needed to do and your receptionist just raising her voice and getting more strident in her tone with her was wholly unacceptable. In the end another patient stepped in and took the lady to one side to explain!

I came in again this morning to drop off a prescription request and once again she was badgering someone on the phone. Goodness only knows what they were asking but she was being particularly rude, saying that it wasn’t her fault and to speak with the Practice Manager. Lots of raised eyebrows were in the waiting room listening to the encounter. You must know she behaves like this – even some of the other receptionists looked embarrassed but it seems she’s been there for years and no one will stand up to her.

You have numerous signs up around the surgery saying that rude and aggressive behaviour will not be tolerated and threatening to remove patients from your list – but what protection do we have from your rude staff?”

Key questions to consider:-

- She is complaining on behalf of someone else – what does she want you to do?
- This is about a colleague – how do you support one another?
- This is an “anecdotal” complaint – has there been any other people raising this?
- Is this an ongoing problem that you are aware of?
5. Delay In Diagnosis

“I am writing on behalf of my father who came to the surgery some months ago feeling generally under the weather. The catalogue of errors made to date by the whole of the NHS has delayed his diagnosis with leukaemia and I am copying this in to the Health Ombudsman as it is this delay which I feel has adversely affected his treatment:-

- **August** – appointment with GP having waited 3 weeks to get an appointment
- **Routine blood tests ordered by GP**
- **Rescheduled appointment due to sickness of phlebotomist**
- **Rescheduled of second appointment due to being booked in too late in the day to do necessary blood test**
- **No contact from the surgery with results**
- **4 phone calls to get the results**
- **Eventual call from GP to say that delay has been in getting results for thyroid**
- **Transpires thyroid blood test was not taken**
- **Another appointment to take this blood test**
- **Another appointment with GP to discuss referral**
- **Referral to Hospital with a promised 2 week appointment**
- **Hospital claims not to have received the letter**
- **Further chasing by us to find out where the appointment is**
- **Eventual appointment through from the hospital – no results available – couldn’t be found on the system!**
- **Further delay whilst waiting for consultant to investigate and eventually another appointment to discuss commencement of treatment.**
We are so delighted that all the promises by the politicians, both local and national and the publicity for our brilliant health service has served this uncomplaining, mild mannered and gentle soul so well! You should all be thoroughly ashamed of yourselves.”

Key questions to consider:-

- What does this family want?
- What is reasonable for them as an outcome given the seriousness of the clinical case
- This is a break-down at the Hospital end – what can the Practice do to help?
- How much of this scenario is reasonable for you to be able to address and resolve?
Paying For Injections

“Please can someone explain to me why we are expected to pay for our injections to go abroad? These are required under the health guidance for the country we are visiting and yet do not form part of the health service provision.

When I queried this with your office administrator, I was informed that the practice booklet clearly states that payment is required and this is not open to discussion.

My husband is required to travel to locations all over the world where health provision is poor and these are injections are all required – it’s not like we are going on a family holiday. Your office suggested that “his company should pay” but frankly I don’t see what business it is of your surgery to state what my husband’s employer should pay for and I thought this was a service, “free to all at the point of delivery” unless of course that is just for all the foreign people coming in and using our health service.

Please can someone provide a reasonable explanation for this additional strain on our finances in these difficult times?”

Key questions to consider:-

- Why is she angry when she has been told where to find the details of why you have to pay for these?
- Do you need to look at how the message is communicated to patients?
- Implications of a financial burden on the family – how can you help with this if at all?
- How can you de-fuse her anger but still obtain the payment for the service?