Tips on managing complaints

Back to Basics August 2018

Community and Oral Health Directorate

*Consumer Feedback, Compliments and Complaints procedure*
Learning outcomes

• Describe where to locate the Consumer Feedback, Compliments and Complaints procedure
• Identify five steps on how to deal with a complaint
• Discuss five approaches on how to manage anger and aggression
• Relate de-escalation techniques to an incident of aggression you have experienced
• List 3 ways to care for yourself and develop resilience
• List the five articles of legislation that relate to complaints management at COHD
• Recognise the role of the consumer liaison officer in managing consumer concerns
Overview

- Queensland Health is committed to effectively and efficiently managing complaints received through the development, implementation and evaluation of robust local HHS procedures.
- A key component of consumer feedback systems is having an effective and responsive complaints management process.
- All staff working in Community and Oral Health Directorate are encouraged to receive consumer feedback in the spirit of helpful cooperation so that they may make the best use of these opportunities

“Tell us what you think!”
Locating the procedure
Minor complaints

• If you are the first member of staff that the consumer approaches about a complaint, you have an important role in starting to resolve the complaint
Handling a complaint at frontline gives us the chance to -

• discuss and resolve the issue quickly
• avoid the complaint turning into a dispute
• prevent bad publicity
Steps when hearing a complaint from a consumer

• Listen carefully
• Empathise and acknowledge the complainant’s feelings
• Clarify the issues with the complainant to ensure you have understood their concerns
• Find out what they want to happen as a result of the complaint
• DO NOT promise to do something which is not achievable
What else can you do?

• Resolve the complaint if possible, or commit to doing something immediately regardless of who will ultimately resolve the complaint
• Acknowledge the complaint
• Inform the complainant of what will happen with their complaint if you are unable to resolve it at frontline (i.e. complaint will be forwarded to the Consumer Liaison Officer who will organise the investigation and response. The health service endeavours to resolve complaints within 35 days)
• Document the complaint in RiskMan CF including the date of acknowledgement
**Documentation**

- Document any actions you have taken to resolve the complaint.
- Thank the complainant for their feedback and reassure them that their concerns are important and will be investigated and staff will be contact them.
- Forward all documentation for processing to the Consumer Liaison Officer by emailing:
  - MNHHS-CLO_CISS@health.qld.gov.au
- Refer to the CISS Consumer Feedback, Compliments and Complaints Procedure for additional information.
Complaints Management Process

1. Verbal or written complaint at point of service
2. Clarify with complainant what they want to see happen in response to their complaint
3. What is the severity rating of the complaint?
   - Negligible/Minor
     - Complaint is entered into RiskMan CF and Line Manager notified
     - Line Manager manages the complaint and enters management actions and closes off the complaint in RiskMan CF
   - Moderate and above
     - Immediately escalate to the CLO and notify Senior Management. CLO enters complaint into RiskMan CF and sends acknowledgment letter.
     - CLO liaises with Senior Management to investigate and provide a response
     - CLO develops final response letter to complainant following clearance by the Executive Director

Complaints Comments Compliments
Managing Angry or Aggressive Complainants

- People who have a complaint may be angry, irritated, rude, hurt, impatient, persistent, distressed, grieving, furious, emotional, aggressive, sarcastic, loud, and make unreasonable demands.
- These emotions can make it more difficult for staff to communicate with the consumer and get to the source of the complaint.
- However, Queensland Health does not accept behaviour such as verbal or physical aggression.
Why do people get so angry?

- Instead of addressing an issue when it first arises, a consumer may wait and stew over the issues until they are angry enough to complain.
- Sometimes a complaint is made in an angry manner because of previous poor experiences with the HHS or another health service.
- A consumer may believe the only way to get their desired outcome is through aggression.
Anger and anxiety

- Their anger may be a result of their frustration in believing that nothing will be done about their complaint.
- The angry person is often reacting because of worry, fear or frustration and they need to express that feeling.
- Foreign environments such as hospitals, where people are out of their comfort zone can provoke anxiety.
- Their feelings are real, even if their expression of those feelings is inappropriate (*perception is reality*).
- Their behaviour may be irrational, however you need to behave professionally.
- The expression of anger varies from one culture to another.
- Anger and intimidation can hide poorly developed communication or problem-solving skills.
- Verbal aggression can be just as devastating to staff as physical aggression.
Anger can escalate to aggression

- Remember anger can escalate to aggression
- If you feel threatened or have concerns about your personal safety and the safety of those around them, then the situation needs to be treated as aggressive
- Your personal safety and the safety of those around you is the priority
- If there is any physical violence or attempted destruction of property, terminate the discussion, leave immediately and initiate the HHS’s security procedures
- Make sure you are up to date with your OVP training
De-escalation techniques

If appropriate employ the following de-escalation techniques:

• listen
• empathise
• maintain privacy
• clarify the complaint
• apologise that this has happened
De-escalation

- Maintain a professional approach.
- A poorly handled complaint can turn a calm complainant into an angry or aggressive person, or make an already angry person extremely aggressive.
- Staff who can manage the situation well can make all the difference for both the consumer and the staff.
Practical tips

• Develop and explain the options
• Keep your focus on the problem rather than the anger
• Offer alternatives
• Even if you can’t meet their needs entirely at that point in time, offering alternatives can make them less unhappy
• If they play a role in the decision making it gives them some control
• Always let your team leader/NUM know what is happening so that they can advise and support you
Strategies when dealing with complaints

- Do what you can do that comes closest to meeting their needs
- Provide clear and thorough explanations, this may resolve a complaint
- Inform the person regularly about what is happening in relation to their complaint
- Telephone the person and let them know if there is a delay in getting back to the person about their complaint, provide your name and phone number so they can call you if they need to
- This personal touch shows them that they are important, that the complaint is being investigated, and gives them a personal link to the organisation
Follow up

• After the incident, document what happened into RiskMan CF and inform your Line Manager and any other relevant personnel – including Security
• Debrief, have a break, and seek any other support you require
• Repeated events or significant isolated events can significantly impact on the emotional, professional, social and psychological wellbeing of individuals
In cases of aggressive behaviour

• Wherever possible, move to a position where there is a barrier between you and the complainant ie. move behind a counter or a desk for example
• Keep your distance and never turn your back on the person
• Have an escape route planned – know where you can exit through a door and walk away if you feel threatened
• Maintain normal eye contact and non-confrontational body language
• Use a firm voice and be assertive
• Stay calm
• Wait for the person to run out of steam then ask open clarifying questions that give the person an opportunity to say what they are feeling
• Ensure there is another person nearby, or if interviewing the complainant in a room, that another person is present
• If you feel it is necessary, terminate the interview and offer a follow up interview before requesting the person leave
What not to do

• lose your cool – don’t become aggressive
• threaten, be confrontational or humiliate the person
• antagonise the person with words, or body language
• be overwhelmed by their behaviour
• take it personally
• **Do remember EAS**
Telephone aggression

In cases of a telephone complaint made by a verbally aggressive person, stay calm and try to find out what the issue is by asking open questions. If the aggression continues:

• advice the caller that verbal abuse is not acceptable and if it continues you will hang up
• continue attempting to establish what the issues are
• simply threatening to hang up can increase the person’s anger
Remember your training

- If appropriate employ the de-escalation techniques
- Maintain a professional approach
- A poorly handled complaint can turn a calm complainant into an angry or aggressive person, or make an already angry person extremely aggressive
- Staff who can manage the situation well can make all the difference for both the consumer and the staff

For further information, please contact your Consumer Liaison Officer: t: 07 3049 1537 e: MNHHS-CLO_CISS@health.qld.gov.au
Legislation Relevant to Consumer Complaints

• It is the role of all Queensland Health staff to ensure that consumer privacy and confidentiality is maintained when managing consumers’ complaints.
• When accepting a complaint from a third person in relation to the treatment of a patient, ensure that the patient is aware and happy by seeking consent for the investigation and the information in relation to treatment to be provided.
Legislation

- Code of Conduct
- Public Sector Ethics Act 1994
- Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011
- Information Privacy Act 2009
- Right to Information Act 2009

All legislation noted in this section can be accessed through the QHEPS or Office of Queensland Parliamentary Council’s website at www.legislation.qld.gov.au
Role of the Consumer Liaison Officer

- Consumer Liaison Officers (CLO) have the important role of facilitating and overseeing the complaint management process within COHD and ensuring the rights and legitimate interests of both consumers and the health service is protected.
- The CLO offers an accessible, dedicated single point of contact for complainants and staff ensuring timely, coordinated and responsive communication is consistently maintained throughout the complaint process.

You can contact your Consumer Liaison Officer:
- t: 07 3049 1537
- e: CISS-CLO@health.qld.gov.au

Your team leader is always your first point of contact.
In summary

- Queensland Health is committed to effectively and efficiently managing complaints according to local HHS procedures which can be found on QHEPS on the COHD home page.
- A key component of consumer feedback systems is having an effective and responsive complaints management process and for staff to know how to implement it.
- All staff working in Community and Oral Health Directorate are encouraged to receive consumer feedback in the spirit of helpful cooperation so that they may make the best use of these opportunities.
- Remember that feedback is an excellent opportunity to improve our services.
- There is support for staff when handling stressful experiences from consumer complaints.
Quick quiz

- Describe where to locate the Consumer Feedback, Compliments and Complaints procedure
- Identify five steps on how to deal with a complaint
- Discuss five approaches on how to manage anger and aggression
- Relate de-escalation techniques to an incident of aggression you have experienced
- List 3 ways to care for yourself and develop resilience
- List the five articles of legislation that relate to complaints management at COHD
- Recognise the role of the consumer liaison officer in managing consumer concerns
Resources