

'Spotlight on' series

Dealing with complaints

Responding to complaints is part of being a doctor, but it can be stressful for the individuals involved. Read our tips to help reduce the impact of complaints on your wellbeing and performance.

1 Keep perspective



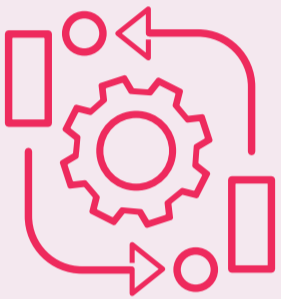
Try not to take complaints personally.

Take advice from those who are used to dealing with complaints.

Get extra support from family, friends, colleagues, and other professionals.

Keep thank you cards and letters to remind you of the positive feedback you've received.

2 Follow the correct procedure for signing off responses



Never try to deal with a formal complaint on your own: use your hospital complaints/legal team to collate responses and deal with the complainant directly.

Inform the complainant how the process works, their contact person and timescales.

Review the final letter from the complaints team before it gets sent to the complainant.

3 Provide a thorough and detailed first response



This minimises the chance of escalation of the complaint.

The tone should be professional, measured and empathetic; make sure you avoid jargon.

Address the complainant as "you" as this offers a more personal tone to your response.

4 Reply in a timely manner



This avoids causing further distress to the complainant.

5

Apologise when appropriate



Remember that saying sorry is not an admission of liability.

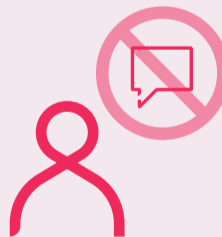
6 Have a witness if meeting patients or relatives in challenging circumstances



A second person, for example a nurse specialist, can be independent confirmation of what was said and can offer support to all involved.

7

Don't give opinion on the acts or omissions of colleagues



If multiple clinicians are involved, you can combine the comments into a single response.

8



Reflect and feedback

Discuss with your colleagues to share learning points more widely.

Share changes you have made with the complainant.

Useful links

<https://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/Component/Details/433027> - e-LFH module
www.medicalprotection.org/docs/mp/generic/eng-med-complaints-booklet.pdf
www.themdu.com/guidance-and-advice/guides/how-to-respond-to-a-complaint

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