

Learning Line – Lessons Learnt

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In this second edition of Learning Line there are some more examples of complaints that the Clinical Advisers have dealt with and the key areas of learning that they highlight.

Summary of complaint 1

An elderly patient attended a GDP with carious roots and a poorly fitting post crown. The roots were extracted, a partial denture made and the post crown re-fixed. Soon after the post crown failed multiple times and the patient went elsewhere where they were informed that the root had a hopeless prognosis, required extraction and an addition to the denture was warranted.

Outcome

As the radiographs taken were inadequate and the previous radiographs were not examined the complaint was upheld, the patient was refunded charges.

Key Learning Points

When faced with recurrently failing treatment a full assessment of why the failures may be occurring is necessary. This would include viewing appropriate radiographs, a review of historical treatment and radiographs previously taken.

Summary of complaint 2

A patient complained that the practice waiting room was not clean and there was nowhere to wash or dry hands, there was also a clinical complaint. The practice assured the patient that all the issues were investigated and addressed. An NHSE practice visit found that the issues were not addressed. Only the practice manager responded to the complaint and there was no input from the performer concerned regarding the clinical complaint which was not addressed at all in the response letter.

Outcome

Complaint upheld.

Key Learning points

The Complaints Manager is responsible for the correct application of the procedures. An appointed responsible person should ensure the complaint is acted on and ensure compliance and appropriate action is taken. GDC Standards principle 5 states that patients expect their concerns or complaints to be acknowledged, listened to and dealt with promptly. Failure to follow the practice complaints policy procedure can lead to further issues.

Summary of Complaint 3

A patient complained about being deregistered from an NHS practice due to a break down in relationship. The patient had been recording the dentist during the examination.

Outcome

Partially upheld as the patient was not given details on how to try and register elsewhere or access emergency treatment.

Key Learning Points

If you are considering ending the dentist/patient relationship, you should consider the following points:

- Try to remain objective and don't allow personal feelings to colour your judgement
- Don't remove a patient solely because they have complained
- Document any steps you have taken to warn the patient about their behaviour if necessary
- If ending the relationship, be prepared to provide the patient with a reason for your decision (although this may not be appropriate if the patient has been violent)
- Ensure the process complies with your existing contractual obligations, e.g. giving appropriate notice, notifying your Local Area Team or NHS England/Health Board, notifying the patient where they can access emergency treatment or find a new dentist
- Remember, ending a professional relationship with a patient does not usually justify refusing to continue treating their family as well.

Ending a professional relationship can lead to a complaint, so you may wish to get advice from your dental defence organisation before finalising your decision

This is the second of these bulletins and we aim to continue these publications to help the profession learn from complaints.

I am grateful for help from my Dental Clinical Adviser colleagues in producing this bulletin.

Shabir Shivji

Dental Clinical Adviser

NHS England South East (Kent, Surrey & Sussex)