

COMPLAINTS POLICY AND PROCEDURE

1. Purpose and Scope

We are committed to providing the highest standard of care to every patient, and we recognise that, occasionally, a patient may feel that the service, care or treatment they received did not meet their expectations. We welcome feedback and treat every complaint seriously, fairly and confidentially.

This policy sets out how patients can raise a concern or make a complaint, and how the practice will handle, investigate and respond to it. Making a complaint will not adversely affect care or treatment.

All clinicians (including dentists, hygienists and medical professionals) providing clinical treatment at the practice do so as self-employed associates in independent practice. They are individually and professionally responsible for the clinical care, advice, conduct and communications they provide to their own patients. The practice cannot respond on behalf of any associate in relation to matters that remain within the associate's professional responsibility, direct their clinical decisions, or accept responsibility for their acts or omissions.

We are a fully private dental practice and do not provide NHS treatment, therefore this policy does not refer to the NHS complaints process.

2. Our Principles

In handling complaints, the practice endeavours to:

- Treat all feedback as important to us, whether it is positive, a concern, or a formal complaint;
- Make it easy for every patient to complain, and support them to do so;
- Follow a clear complaints procedure and keep the patient informed of progress;
- Investigate complaints promptly, proportionately, fairly and professionally;
- Address patient concerns as fully as possible;
- Maintain patient confidentiality; and
- Use the outcome of complaints, where appropriate, to improve the services we provide.

3. Confidentiality and Who Can Make a Complaint

All complaints are handled in confidence. To protect the confidentiality of all patients, if someone other than the patient makes a complaint, we will need to make sure they have the authority to do so. Accordingly, the practice will not discuss, confirm or deny the existence of any other patient's records, treatment or attendance without that patient's explicit written consent.

When a complaint is made on behalf of a child or an individual lacking mental capacity, representatives must be able to demonstrate: i) that there are reasonable grounds for representing the patient and ii) that they are genuinely acting in the best interests of the patient.

When making a written complaint, please provide: your full name, date of birth and address. If you are complaining on behalf of the patient, please provide their written consent and your relationship with the patient.

4. How to Make a Complaint

4.1 In person or by telephone

Patients may raise a concern in person or by telephone. For telephone numbers see Section 9. Wherever possible and appropriate, we will try to resolve the matter informally and immediately. If the matter cannot be resolved on the spot, or if the patient wishes to make a formal complaint, they will be asked to put the complaint in writing (see 4.2 below) so that it can be formally investigated.

Any request for a refund must be made in writing.

COMPLAINTS POLICY

4.2 In writing

Complaints can be made in writing by:

- Email to complaints@thehubdentalpractice.co.uk; or
- Letter addressed to the Complaints Manager, The Hub Dental Practice, 780 South Fifth Street, Milton Keynes, MK9 2FX.

Please note: Whilst it is preferred to email the practice, if you do wish to send a complaint by post, we recommend patients hand-deliver letters to the practice or use a tracked/signed-for postal service, as the practice cannot accept responsibility for letters lost or delayed in the post.

Social Media and Online Platforms: Patients are free to raise concerns or leave reviews on public platforms such as Google or social media. However, these platforms do not allow us to investigate or respond to complaints in a meaningful way, as we cannot discuss patient-specific or clinical information in a public forum. If a patient wishes to have their concerns fully investigated and resolved, we encourage them to contact the practice directly through the formal complaints process outlined above, where the matter can be considered thoroughly and confidentially.

4.3 Timing

A complaint should normally be made within 12 months of the event giving rise to it, or within 12 months of the matter coming to the patient's attention, whichever is later. This time limit may be extended where the practice considers it fair and reasonable to do so.

5. Division of Responsibility: Practice and Associates

The dentists, hygienists and other clinicians practising at the practice are self-employed associates practising independently and are not employees of the practice. The relationship between each patient and each clinician exists as a separate legal relationship alongside your relationship with the practice.

As independent practitioners, clinicians are responsible for the clinical decisions they make and the treatment they provide. Accordingly, the practice cannot make decisions or provide responses on their behalf in relation to their conduct or clinical care. Where appropriate, complaints relating to a clinician will therefore be referred to the clinician concerned so that they can consider the matter and provide an appropriate response or resolution.

All clinicians practising at the practice are registered with the General Dental Council (GDC), are required to comply with the GDC's *Standards for the Dental Team*, and must maintain appropriate professional indemnity arrangements in accordance with their professional and regulatory obligations.

5.1 Matters the practice is responsible for

The practice will handle, investigate and respond directly to complaints which fall within its remit, including those related to:

- The conduct, behaviour or service provided by practice employees, including receptionists, dental nurses, and management staff;
- The administration, facilities and general operation of the practice;
- Practice-level charges and fees, where these do not relate to the clinical fee-setting decisions of an individual associate; and
- The management and implementation of this complaints procedure.

5.2 Matters that are the associate's own responsibility

The practice does investigate complaints relating to the care provided by a self-employed associate and will support the complaints process. However, the practice is not permitted to respond on behalf of a self-employed associate in relation to matters that remain within the associate's professional responsibility nor

COMPLAINTS POLICY

make decisions that are the responsibility of the treating clinician. Patients can expect a response directly from the dentist in relation to complaints made in relation to:

- Clinical treatment, clinical judgement or treatment planning;
- The associate's conduct or communication with the patient;
- Alleged errors or omissions by the associate personally, for example a failure to make a referral or communicate with an external laboratory, where this results from the associate's own clinical decision-making rather than an administrative failure by the practice; and
- Any other matter concerning the associate's personal professional practice.

Where a complaint falls into this category, the practice will forward the complaint to the associate concerned, coordinate correspondence where appropriate, monitor progress and seek to ensure the complaint is addressed within reasonable timescales. The associate is responsible for providing a response to the patient directly in relation to their own clinical care and professional responsibilities, including where the associate is no longer contracted with the practice.

5.3 Complaints that involve both the practice and an associate

Some complaints raise issues that span both categories above. For example, a complaint that a clinical procedure was carried out poorly, and that reception staff were then unhelpful when the patient tried to raise it. In these cases, the practice will investigate and respond to the elements within its own responsibility and will separately forward the clinical elements to the associate concerned for their own investigation and response, so the patient receives a complete answer to both parts of their complaint.

5.4 Complaints involving multiple clinicians

Where a patient makes a complaint about more than one clinician, the practice will coordinate the investigation, but each clinician remains responsible for responding in relation to their own clinical care.

6. The Complaints Procedure

6.1 Complaints Manager

Miss Emily Kennedy is the practice's designated Complaints Manager and is responsible for overseeing the handling of complaints in accordance with this policy. In her absence, complaints will be handled by a Practice Manager or another nominated senior employee of the practice.

6.2 Acknowledgement

We aim to acknowledge all formal complaints in writing within 3 working days of receipt, normally by email unless the patient requests another method, and will enclose a copy of this policy. If a complainant does not receive an acknowledgement within this timeframe, they should contact the practice by telephone, as complaints are occasionally not received due to technical or administrative issues outside our control.

6.3 Investigation

Once acknowledged, a complaint will be investigated in a manner appropriate and proportionate to its nature and seriousness. We aim to keep the patient informed of progress as far as is reasonably practicable throughout the investigation. As part of the investigation, we may request to have a meeting directly with the patient to discuss the matter. Further, the practice and any associate involved in the complaint may review clinical records, radiographs, photographs and any other relevant documentation where appropriate.

6.4 Response

We aim to provide a written response within 14 working days of acknowledging a complaint. Where the complexity of the matter means this is not achievable, we will write to the complainant explaining the reason for the delay and agreeing a revised timescale.

We aim to conclude any investigation and provide a final response within 6 months of receiving the complaint, save in exceptional circumstances, which will be explained to the complainant in writing.

COMPLAINTS POLICY

If you have not received a response within the agreed timescale, please contact the practice. While we make every effort to ensure correspondence is sent promptly, unforeseen administrative or delivery issues beyond the practice's control may occasionally occur.

Formal complaints are recorded and retained in accordance with legal and regulatory requirements. Information may be anonymised and used for audit, staff training and quality improvement.

6.5 Refunds

Any request for a refund must be made in writing. Where a refund relates to treatment provided by a self-employed associate, the decision on whether to provide a refund rests with that associate; the practice is not able to make this decision on an associate's behalf. Where the practice does process a refund payment, this is not an admission of liability by the practice.

6.6 Accessibility

Please let us know if you require assistance in accessing this complaints procedure. Reasonable adjustments will be made where necessary to assist patients with disabilities or communication needs.

7. Unreasonable, Vexatious or Abusive Conduct

We do not tolerate physical, verbal or written abuse, threats or harassment directed at any member of our team, whether in person, by telephone, in writing, by email or on social media. Any such incident may be reported to the police.

Where a complainant repeatedly raises the same issue after it has been fully investigated and responded to, makes excessive or unreasonable demands on staff time, or pursues a complaint in a manner that is abusive, aggressive or vexatious, the practice reserves the right to restrict, limit or refuse further correspondence on the matter. Patients may still refer the matter to an external body under Section 8.

8. If the Complaint Cannot Be Resolved Locally

We are a fully private practice, so NHS complaint routes do not apply. If our local resolution procedure does not resolve a complaint to the patient's satisfaction, or if a patient feels our procedure is not appropriate to their needs, they may refer the matter to one of the following independent bodies, depending on the nature of the complaint:

- Complaints about private dental treatment — Dental Complaints Service (operated by the General Dental Council): telephone 020 8253 0800, website www.dentalcomplaints.org.uk;
- Concerns about a registered dental professional's fitness to practise — General Dental Council (GDC): telephone 020 7167 6000, website www.gdc-uk.org;
- Concerns about the safety or quality of care at the practice — Care Quality Commission (CQC): telephone 03000 616161, email enquiries@cqc.org.uk;
- Complaints relating to a regulated credit or finance agreement used to pay for treatment — Financial Ombudsman Service: telephone 0800 023 4567, website www.financial-ombudsman.org.uk;
- Data protection concerns relating to the handling of a complaint or personal information — Information Commissioner's Office (ICO): telephone 0303 123 1113, website www.ico.org.uk.

9. Contact details for complaints:

- Complaints emails: complaints@thehubdentalpractice.co.uk
- Complaints by phone:
 - The Hub Dental Practice: 01908 690326
 - The Smile Studio Milton Keynes: 01908 690326
 - Northampton Dental Hub: 01604 600334
 - Peterborough Dental Hub: 01733 214161
 - Wycombe Dental Hub: 01494 490450
 - Cambridge Dental Hub: 01223 363277
- Complaints by post: 780 South Fifth Street, Milton Keynes, MK9 2FX

COMPLAINTS FLOWCHART

Please note: The flowchart below provides a simplified overview of our Complaints Policy to help patients understand the complaints process. It is intended as a guide only. For full details, including timescales, responsibilities and escalation options, please refer to our full Complaints Policy.

How to Make a Complaint

A simple step-by-step guide for patients

