

STAFF INFORMATION ON CONSUMER FEEDBACK AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING

SA Health is committed to engaging and partnering with consumers, carers and the community and values the positive contributions they make, through feedback and complaints, in improving health care service quality, equity and management.

Feedback and complaints are extremely important for SA Health, and for consumers, carers and the community who access healthcare services.

WHAT IS A COMPLAINT?

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction, concern or harm by a health care service requiring action. The consumer, their family, carers or a person or organisation advocating on their behalf, including a health professional or service provider, may make a complaint.

A complaint may be a single issue or concern at the point of care that staff may be able to readily resolve to the satisfaction of the consumer; a complex or serious issue that requires escalation to a more formal investigation and resolution process.

It may be current or previous issue or concern with more than one service or staff involved, which requires a coordinated review and investigation by multiple people.

A clear process for appropriate escalation, investigation, resolution and communication with the complainant is required to ensure all staff are aware of and able to respond effectively to all levels of severity.

Complaints vary in complexity and severity, the level of which is indicated by factors such as the:

- > degree of underlying, causative issues that may have precipitated the complaint
- > range of inter-dependent issues (including multiple services and individuals involved)
- > potentially unresolvable nature of the complaint (ie difficult to achieve satisfactory outcome for all parties)
- > unpredictable nature of complaint outcome
- > level of investigation and examination of the events and/or circumstances that led to the consumer making the complaint.
- > level of resource intensiveness of the complaint management process due to any or all of these factors
- > potential for litigation.

CONSUMER OUTCOME

Consumer, carers and community representative outcomes include:

- > an explanation
- > an apology
- > assurance the feedback or complaint will be reviewed and investigated
- > action will be undertaken to address and resolve the complaint / issue.
- > inform the complainant that changes to practice or quality improvements made have occurred, as a result of their feedback.

TYPES OF COMPLAINTS

Feedback and complaints can be grouped into three (3) categories, including:

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| Point of service / complaints / enquiries | These are straightforward complaints, which can be dealt with promptly and to the consumers, carers or community's satisfaction at the point of service. Sometimes all that is needed to resolve an issue is for the consumer, carer or community representative to speak directly to staff involved. |
| Complaints needing investigation | More serious or complex matters or unresolved complaints may need to be referred to more senior staff or consumer advisory services. There is a need for investigation and a clear outcome identified. This may involve different level of the health service. |
| External complaints | These complaints are unresolved by the health service and need to be referred to external bodies or insurers to deal with. Also, some complaints first come from the Health and Community Services Complaints Commissioner (HCSCC). |

POINT OF SERVICE

- > Consumer feedback and complaints should be dealt with directly and quickly at the point where the issue arises.
- > Staff should assess whether they can deal with the issue themselves, as the issue is straightforward and easy to resolve.
- > Consider involving manager or consumer advisory service if the issue is serious or complex.

ACTIVE LISTENING

- > listen to the feedback / complaint, and provide your full attention
- > do not interrupt unnecessarily
- > establish eye contact and using positive body language.

ASK

- > can you tell me what happened?
- > can you explain the issue / problem you are experiencing?
- > what would you like to see happen?

TIPS FOR COMPLAINT HANDLING

- > be confident in your ability to help
- > remain flexible – don't be too rigid in your approach
- > establish eye contact and using positive body language
- > communicate clearly – check if you're being understood
- > know your limits – be willing to get help from someone else with more knowledge or authority
- > try to remain calm and think clearly
- > strike a balance between logic and emotion.

Reference: Adapted from Guide to complaint handling in health care services, Health Services Review Council

WHEN TO REFER A COMPLAINT ON TO CONSUMER ADVISORY SERVICE OR SENIOR EXECUTIVE

Staff need to be informed of the health services complaints management system, so that they can understand when to involve the Consumer Advisory Service or Senior Executive.

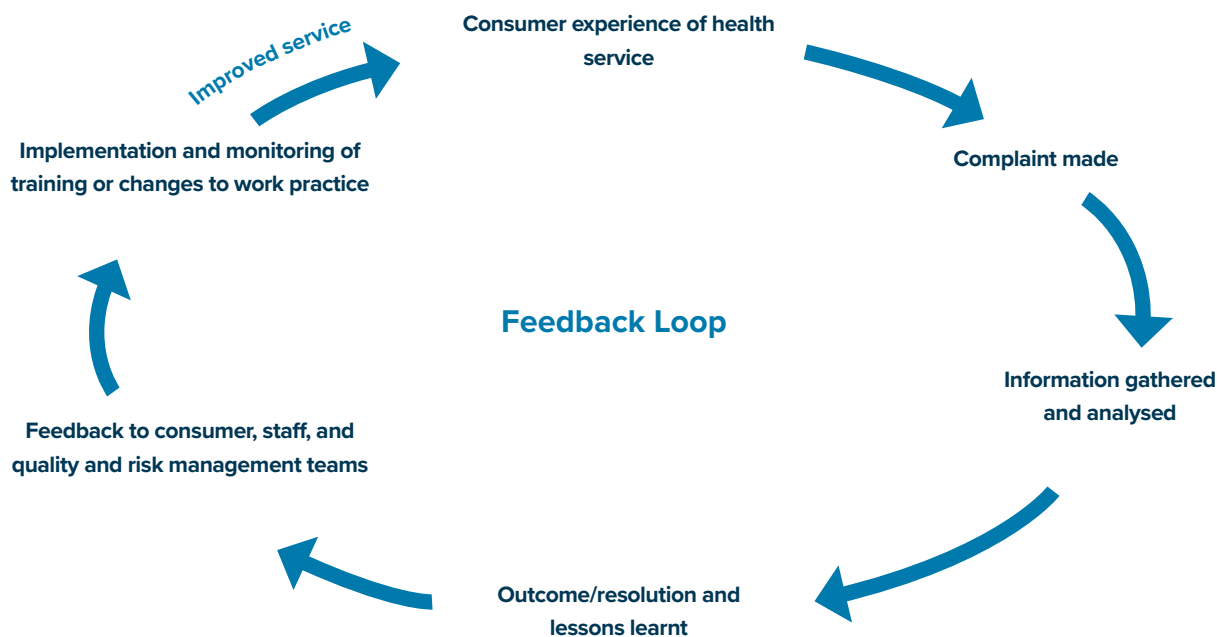
Complaints should be referred if:

- > complaint / issue is unresolved at point of service
- > involves serious consequences
- > involves complex medical issues or a number of different staff
- > needs action that is beyond the responsibility of the staff at the point of service
- > needs to be dealt with by someone with more authority.

SAFETY LEARNING SYSTEM CONSUMER FEEDBACK MODULE

The SA Health Consumer, Carer and Community Feedback and Complaints Management Strategic Framework and guide states:

- > All feedback including complaints, compliments, suggestions and advise should be recorded in the Safety Learning System (SLS) Consumer Feedback module
- > Finding SLS on your computer – click Start > All Programs > Corporate programs > SAH Applications > Safety Learning System



Reference: *Guiding principles for an effective complaint handling system*, Health Service Council

Further information

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