

# Managing complaints in sonography



Receiving a complaint is an unexpected part of running any business. No business is immune from receiving a complaint, regardless of how successful it is or how customer focused staff are. There can be a tendency to see a complaint as a personal criticism rather than constructive feedback. However there can be positive outcomes when the situation is managed appropriately.

## Why do people complain?

There are many reasons why patients might complain about the service they've received. Sometimes a complaint will almost be expected following an incident; sometimes it'll take you by complete surprise. Understanding why people might complain can assist with managing a complaint if it occurs and potentially reducing the likelihood of further complaints.

The following are some of the reasons why people may feel the need to complain.

**High expectations** – consumer expectations are increasingly high when engaging professional services. Your patients will see you as a highly trained and qualified professional. This view can influence their expectations about the service and outcomes they anticipate.

**Unrealistic expectations** – it's possible that patients may have unrealistic expectations about what they can reasonably expect from the service you provide. Their high expectations may at times surprise you. It's therefore important to remember that most patients will not have the clinical knowledge you do and what's obvious or common sense to you may not be to them. A sonographer must assist patients to be clear and fully informed about the service being provided and the outcomes they can realistically expect.

**To inform and be heard** – patients may wish to make a complaint about an incident or poor outcome so they're sure someone's aware of what's occurred and how they feel. They may wish to complain just to be listened to and acknowledged, especially if they've been adversely impacted. Not all complaints will lead to a formal demand for compensation.

**Belief that someone is responsible** – when something goes wrong, we often try to determine who's responsible. Sometimes someone is obviously responsible, sometimes it's hard to determine who's responsible and other times there's no one person responsible but just an unfortunate set of circumstances. However, if a patient thought something had gone wrong and this led to

them being harmed, it's quite possible they may complain with the intention of holding someone responsible and possibly liable.

## The importance of managing complaints

There may sometimes be a temptation to ignore a complaint and hope it'll just go away. Maybe the patient won't follow up. Maybe the incident won't occur again. This is a very short-sighted way to run any business as there are clear benefits to appropriately managing complaints.

Patients will generally expect to see their complaint dealt with quickly and fairly. When this doesn't happen it's possible that further complaints will follow, and the issue or concern could become a much greater one. Complaints may also escalate to a regulatory body.

Complaints can provide a business with an opportunity to review and improve their service. Receiving a complaint may highlight an issue which the business had not been aware of. When investigating and dealing with the complaint, the business may wish to consider a change in procedure to avoid that issue arising again in the future.

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## How to manage complaints

It's advisable that every business has a complaints policy. This means that the business will have an agreed-to process for dealing with a complaint which allows for all complaints to be managed in a fair and consistent manner. It also means staff know what to do which is important as managing complaints can be quite challenging.

A key aspect in dealing with any complaint is listening to the person. Where possible, make time to sit down in a quiet space and give them time to express their concerns. Make the effort to hear what they have to say and take on board what

they've told you. You may not agree with all they're saying, however it helps if you can try to understand the situation from their perspective. You may wish to ask them to document their concerns so you both have an accurate record of the matter. Avoid being defensive or taking the complaint personally as this may inflame the situation.

With low level complaints you may be able to offer a solution there and then. However, this won't always be the case. With more serious complaints you should provide the person with an assurance that you'll investigate the matter and get back to them with a response at a later date.

Guild Insurance expects those insured with us to not admit liability (or name someone else as being at fault), or to offer any compensation without contacting us first. Contact Guild Insurance on 1800 810 213 as soon as you've received a complaint; don't wait till it escalates to a claim for compensation. We'll provide advice and support to assist you to deal appropriately and professionally with what can be a challenging and possibly upsetting situation. Utilising this support can be the difference between sorting a problem quickly and it escalating to a serious claim.



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