

Ending the treating relationship



As a health professional, your focus is on being there for your patients and providing the best healthcare possible to meet their needs. However, there'll be times when the treating relationship isn't effective or appropriate and you wish to end it. Guild Insurance regularly receives queries about how to do this professionally while keeping patient care a core focus.

Possible scenarios

- > There'll be occasions where you realise that the treatment you're able to provide, according to your skills and scope of practice, won't suit the needs of a particular patient. This might be evident at the first consultation, or it might only become apparent after treatment has begun.
- > In other situations, it may not be you as the practitioner who has concerns about treatment, it may be the patient who's expressed concerns. It's possible to face a situation where the patient has expressed dissatisfaction, or a lack of confidence, with treatment. These

situations may lead to the practitioner questioning whether it'll be difficult to meet the expectations of that patient and whether it would be best for them to be treated elsewhere.

- > Unfortunately, there are occasions where a practitioner doesn't want to provide treatment to a patient for safety reasons, not clinical ones. If a patient is making you, your colleagues or other patients feel uncomfortable or unsafe due to their behaviour, this is a very valid reason to end the treating relationship.

Considerations for ending the treating relationship

Be sure there's a proper and fair reason

While health practitioners can end treating relationships, they also need to be sure they're meeting their professional requirements regarding treating patients fairly and with respect. It's therefore recommended that before ending a treating relationship, the practitioner is

honest with themselves in considering their reasons why and be sure they're treating all patients equally when making these decisions.

Consider all options

Before ceasing treatment, consider the various options for the patient, and have a plan for how you'll discuss these options with them. Is there another practitioner at the practice who might be better positioned to treat them? Is there another practice you could recommend they attend instead?

If there are some behavioural challenges with the patient, maybe asking them to book appointments at particular times of the day when there are either more or less, depending on the circumstances, people present.

Maintain appropriate and professional communication

Be sure that the way you deal with what's potentially a challenging situation is done so appropriately. Plan the conversation;

being prepared will likely avoid awkward or inappropriate comments. Be respectful, keeping in mind this conversation could be confronting or upsetting for the patient.

Document the conversation

Keep a record of the conversations had, and the reasons given, for ending the treating relationship. This information should include any responses, both positive and negative, from the patient. Also include any suggestions or referrals given to the patient in terms of them seeking treatment elsewhere.

Maintain continuity of care

Practitioners have an obligation to help to facilitate continuity of care and one way this can be done is by offering to provide the records to the patient's nominated practitioner with a handover.

The practitioner doesn't have to refer them to another practitioner or practice; however, this is an option worth considering. The referral could also be to the patient's GP.

Practitioners should also be mindful that it isn't appropriate to cease a treating relationship if there are any urgent care needs.

Develop practice policies

Practice policies regarding patient behaviour are recommended to support the practice when dealing with challenging patients. These policies should document what's expected of all patients in terms of how they interact with and treat staff. They should be made available to patients, possibly by being posted in the waiting area, treatment areas and on the practice website.

Having this information documented and available will provide support when explaining to patients why they're no longer welcome at the practice. It'll also ensure all patients are treated fairly and equally.



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