

Patient complaint process

Updated Apr 19th 2022 by Dr. Maria-Constanza Torres

Patients complain for many reasons. Some seem reasonable and some do not. However, every complaint is an opportunity to see ourselves from the patient's perspective and to improve how we interact with them. Most complaints, whether they are around treatment concerns, finances or timeliness of care can be mitigated or even completely avoided by better communication.

Communication is an important way that we maintain high patient satisfaction. Return any type of communication from a patient within a day. Emergency communications should be returned by the student within a few hours. When communication fails or becomes difficult, a patient may express concerns or become frustrated.

Rules for communicating in difficult circumstances ([Robert H. Blotter, MD; AAOS Now, November 2009](#)):

1. Be sensitive to your patient's concerns.
2. Explain procedures in language that patients will understand. Use simple, non-medical terminology.
3. Slow down, listen, and please do not be arrogant.
4. Take notes. Repeat key issues back to your patient to be sure that you understand their concern.
5. Please do not refer to rules or policies. Be on the patient's side. Explain what is best and why. Be patient. If this does not help, tell the patient that you will speak with your Practice Coordinator (PC) early on the next business day. (This is not in the cited article).

If you find that you are not able to reason with the patient and the patient insists on speaking with an attending, practice coordinator, faculty, or administrator tell them that you will arrange for this kind of communication the next business day. Enter all communication into the contact notes in the patient's chart. Email your PCs about the patient using your and your instructors' tufts.edu email addresses to protect the patient's privacy. Include the patient's name and record number.

The **PATIENT COMPLAINT PROCESS Checklist**:

1. Student alerts PC that the patient has a complaint. Student documents the issue in the contact notes.
2. If the patient is in the chair, PC tries to alleviate the complaint by talking with the patient. PC highlights the discussion with the patient in the case notes.
3. PC or student relay this information to Bill Dean, william.dean@tufts.edu for follow up and resolution as needed.
4. If the student or PC has a question about how to proceed with a patient issue, please see Bill Dean, Associate Director, Patient Experience, for consultation.
5. Patient to Practice Manager/staff:
 - a. Document concern in Contact Notes in AxiUm
 - b. Practice Manager problem solves issues/concerns.
 - c. If unresolved: Practice Manager involves appropriate Faculty/ATF/Compliance/Administration/ Assoc. Director, Patient Experience.
 - d. Email Associate Director with data information.