

Complaints Policy

Effective Date: 10/07/2026

Review Date: July 2027

1. Purpose

At The Gateway Dental Practice, we are committed to providing safe, high-quality dental care and treating every patient with dignity, compassion and respect. We welcome feedback, concerns, compliments and complaints as opportunities to improve the services we provide.

This policy sets out how we manage concerns in accordance with the Welsh Government's Listening to People: NHS Wales Complaints, Incidents and Redress Process, which came into effect on 1 April 2026.

We aim to:

- Listen carefully to every concern.
 - Resolve issues as quickly and fairly as possible.
 - Be open and honest when things go wrong.
 - Learn from complaints to improve patient care.
 - Ensure patients know how to access support throughout the process.
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2. Scope

This policy applies to:

- NHS dental services provided by the practice.
- All members of the dental team.
- Temporary, agency and locum staff.
- Students and volunteers.

Private complaints will be handled using the same principles of openness, fairness and compassion.

3. Principles

We will ensure that every concern is managed in line with the principles of Listening to People by:

- Listening without judgement.
- Treating everyone with kindness, dignity and respect.
- Providing clear, accessible information.

- Offering support throughout the process.
 - Investigating concerns proportionately.
 - Keeping patients informed.
 - Being open under the NHS Duty of Candour where appropriate.
 - Learning from every complaint to improve services.
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4. Who Can Raise a Concern?

A concern may be raised by:

- A patient.
- A parent or guardian.
- Someone acting on behalf of a patient with appropriate consent.
- A representative where the patient lacks capacity or has died.

Concerns can be raised verbally, in writing, by email or in any accessible format required.

We will provide information in Welsh or English and make reasonable adjustments for patients with communication needs.

5. How to Raise a Concern

Patients may contact:

Stephanie Owers

Complaints Co-ordinator

The Gateway Dental Practice

44 Cross Street, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, NP7 5ER

Telephone: 01873 737737

Email: receptionteamgateway@outlook.com

6. Stage One – Early Resolution

When a concern is received, we will first seek to resolve it promptly through Early Resolution.

This will normally include:

- Acknowledging the concern.
- Offering a listening discussion.
- Understanding what matters most to the patient.

- Agreeing how we will try to resolve the issue.
- Providing explanations where appropriate.
- Offering an apology where appropriate.
- Identifying immediate actions to prevent recurrence.

Many concerns can be resolved quickly at this stage without the need for a formal investigation.

7. Stage 1 - Listening Discussion

As part of the Listening to People process, patients will normally be offered a listening discussion.

The purpose of this discussion is to:

- Hear the patient's experience.
- Clarify concerns.
- Explain the complaints process.
- Agree desired outcomes.
- Discuss next steps.
- Offer advocacy and support.

Patients may choose not to participate in a listening discussion if they prefer.

8. Stage Two – Formal Investigation

Where Early Resolution does not resolve the concern, or where the issue is more serious, the concern will move to a formal investigation. The patient will be advised of how long the investigation will take.

The investigation may include:

- Review of dental records.
- Staff statements.
- Clinical review.
- Review of relevant policies.
- Identification of learning and improvements.
- Experts to check if care was below standard or caused harm. You can have a say in what type of experts are used.

Patients will receive a written response explaining:

- What was investigated.

- Findings.
 - Any apology where appropriate.
 - Actions taken.
 - Service improvements.
 - Information about further options if dissatisfied.
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9. Timescales

We aim to:

- Acknowledge concerns promptly as set out in Stage 1 of the Listening to People guidance.
- Offer a listening discussion as early as possible, we will aim to do this within 10 days from when we receive your complaint.
- Agree an investigation plan where required.
- Keep patients updated if investigations take longer than expected.
- Complete investigations within the timescales set out in the Listening to People guidance whenever reasonably practicable.

If additional time is needed, patients will be informed of the reasons and provided with regular progress updates.

10. Duty of Candour

Where a patient has experienced harm or could have experienced harm, the practice will fulfil its obligations under the NHS Duty of Candour by:

- Being open and honest.
 - Explaining what happened.
 - Offering an apology where appropriate.
 - Explaining what investigations are taking place.
 - Keeping patients informed.
 - Explaining what improvements will be made.
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11. Advocacy and Support

The Complaints Co-ordinator will ensure that all patients are informed of the support available to them throughout the complaints process.

For NHS patients, information will be provided about Llais, the independent citizen voice body for health and social care in Wales, which offers free, confidential and independent advocacy to support patients in raising concerns about NHS services.

For private patients, the Complaints Co-ordinator will provide information about the practice's complaints procedure and, where appropriate, advise patients that they may seek independent assistance from the Dental Complaints Service if their complaint cannot be resolved locally. Where concerns relate to a dental professional's fitness to practise or patient safety, patients may also be advised of the role of the General Dental Council.

Patients may choose to be accompanied or represented by a person of their choice throughout the complaints process, where appropriate. The Complaints Co-ordinator will ensure that information is available in accessible formats and that reasonable adjustments are made to support patients' communication needs.

12. Learning from Complaints

Every complaint is reviewed to identify opportunities for improvement.

Learning may include:

- Staff training.
- Changes to procedures.
- Clinical audit.
- Policy updates.
- Risk assessments.
- Team discussions.

Learning outcomes will be shared with staff where appropriate.

13. Confidentiality

All complaints will be handled confidentially in accordance with:

- UK GDPR.
- Data Protection Act 2018.
- NHS Wales confidentiality requirements.

Information will only be shared with those involved in investigating or resolving the concern.

14. Record Keeping

The practice will maintain a secure complaint register including:

- Date received.

- Nature of concern.
- Actions taken.
- Outcome.
- Learning identified.
- Date closed.

Records will be retained in accordance with NHS Wales record management requirements.

15. If the Patient Remains Dissatisfied

If a patient remains dissatisfied following completion of the practice's complaints process, they may refer the matter to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales.

NHS patients will be provided with the Ombudsman's contact details when the final response is issued.

Private patients will be provided with the General Dental Council's contact details when the final response is issued.

16. Complaints Co-ordinator

The practice has appointed Stephanie Owers as the Complaints Co-ordinator to act as the primary point of contact for patients raising concerns or complaints.

The Complaints Co-ordinator supports the implementation of the Welsh Government's Listening to People: NHS Wales Complaints, Incidents and Redress Process by ensuring that concerns are managed in a compassionate, timely and person-centred manner.

The Complaints Co-ordinator is responsible for:

- Receiving concerns and complaints on behalf of the practice.
- Acting as the main point of contact for patients throughout the complaints process.
- Offering patients the opportunity to participate in a listening discussion as part of the Early Resolution process, enabling them to explain their experience, discuss what matters most to them and identify their preferred outcomes.
- Arranging and facilitating listening discussions where appropriate.
- Recording the patient's concerns, expectations and desired outcomes.
- Providing information about the complaints process and any available advocacy or support services.
- Liaising with the Practice Principal and relevant members of the dental team to ensure concerns are investigated appropriately.
- Coordinating the complaints process and maintaining regular communication with the complainant.

- Monitoring progress to ensure complaints are managed within agreed timescales.
- Maintaining the practice complaints register and ensuring accurate documentation is retained.
- Identifying themes, trends and learning from complaints and supporting continuous service improvement.

The Complaints Co-ordinator acts on behalf of the practice to facilitate communication and coordinate the complaints process. Responsibility for clinical decision-making, the outcome of any clinical investigation, Duty of Candour obligations, and approval of the final complaint response remains with the Practice Principal or their nominated senior clinician.

17. Responsibilities

Practice Principal

The Practice Principal George Warmisham has overall responsibility for the management of complaints within the practice and will:

- Ensure complaints are investigated appropriately.
- Review clinical findings where applicable.
- Fulfil Duty of Candour responsibilities where required.
- Approve the final complaint response.
- Ensure learning from complaints is implemented to improve patient care.

Complaints Co-ordinator

The Complaints Co-ordinator will carry out the responsibilities outlined in Section 16 and will coordinate the day-to-day management of concerns and complaints on behalf of the practice.

All Staff

All members of the dental team are expected to:

- Treat concerns and complaints respectfully and professionally.
- Escalate complaints promptly to the Complaints Co-ordinator.
- Cooperate fully with investigations.
- Participate in listening discussions where appropriate.
- Support learning and quality improvement arising from complaints.

18. Related Policies

- Duty of Candour Policy
- Significant Event Policy
- Incident Reporting Policy

- Data Protection Policy
- Equality and Accessibility Policy
- Clinical Governance Policy

Document Control

Approved by: _____

Date: _____

Review Date: _____