

# Improving Your Internal Grievance Process

## **Educate your patients**

Do your patients know how they can file a grievance, who they can talk to or what their options are? This is a very important first step in ensuring that your unit has a culture where patients feel safe to share their concerns with your team.

1. Know your internal grievance process/policy.
2. Allow your patients to express their concerns to a staff member who they feel comfortable speaking to.
3. If you are the staff person who received the grievance, then you should be the staff person who documents the concerns in the grievance log and then notifies the appropriate individual to ensure that it's properly dealt with in a timely manner.
4. Ensure that your patients are also educated on how to contact the Network as well as the State Survey Agency to file a grievance. This information should be posted in your unit lobby or an area that is accessible to all patients and visitors.

## **Fear of Retaliation**

Many patients report fearing retaliation if they come forward with a concern about their care. There is an inherent power imbalance between dialysis patients and their providers, and their perception is that there will be repercussions for complaining. Inform your patients that they have the right to share their concerns and have them addressed without fear of discrimination, reprisal, or denial of services, and that they are an important part of the team, and you are here to make their lives better. Assure that all staff treat patients with respect and compassion, especially when they have a complaint. This will help to build trust between patients and staff.

## **How can a patient file a complaint or grievance anonymously at the facility level?**

While we hope that all our patients will feel comfortable coming to us with their concerns, there will be times when a patient prefers to file a complaint anonymously. Your facility needs to have a process in place that will allow the patients to do this.

1. Post information for a grievance/complaint line. This could be a corporate number or could even be your main line at the facility. Patients should be allowed to call and provide details anonymously to a unit assistant, unit manager or other staff member.
2. Consider having a form available that patients can fill out and submit anonymously. Submission can be done by mail or you can provide a drop box in your lobby.

Remember to obtain as much information as you can from the anonymous grievant to help ensure a robust investigation can occur. Things to consider: date of incident,

people involved, description of the incident and any witness that may be able to provide additional information. Please note that the grievant has the right to only provide the information they are comfortable with. All concerns must be investigated to the best of your ability with the information you are given.

### **Follow Up and Resolution**

Discuss all grievances with the Governing Body during your monthly Quality Improvement Meetings. This gives the team an opportunity to discuss concerns, identify trends and implement systematic change when needed. The grievance process is not complete unless you identify a resolution and provide some kind of follow-up. A resolution should highlight what went wrong and how we can ensure that the issues will not occur again. Never be afraid to apologize. A simple, "I am sorry that you had that experience" can go a very long way. Take all concerns seriously and make it your goal to make the patient feels heard and respected. The more thorough a job you do at the facility level, the less likely the patient will be to escalate the concern to the Network or the State.

### **Improve Unit Culture**

Remind staff that complaints should not be taken personally and they should never react defensively when a patient brings concerns to their attention. Remember that our patients are a very important part of the treatment team. Their input, concerns, and observations are a valuable tool to help us be better care providers. Take your time when interacting with your patients. Don't rush them and invite them to share their feedback with you. A collaborative and mutually respectful relationship between patients and providers will improve how you deliver care, how you relate to your patients, and will ultimately improve everyone's experience in the unit.

The Forum of ESRD Networks has developed a Grievance Toolkit written for and developed by patients and can be found on the Forum Website:

- [English](#)
- [Spanish](#)