

Responding to abusive patients

As discussed at Receptionists Team meeting, 26 August 2015

Principles:

- Your safety (physical and emotional) is of primary concern
- You do not have to put up with abusive and or offensive behaviour
- You are entitled to tell a patient that what they are doing or saying is unacceptable
- Don't raise your voice
- Be clear and direct
- Calling for help or support is always ok
- Don't hesitate to call the police
- Giving managers card is always a good thing to do

Suggestions for responding when patients are angry and/or abusive:

1. Acknowledge how they feel – this will help them feel heard. If you don't acknowledge them they will feel you are not listening
 - I understand this is upsetting for you
 - I understand that you are really angry about what has happened
 - I understand that this doesn't seem fair etc
2. Thank them for bringing the issue to your attention
 - Thank you for letting us know there is a problem/how this has affected you/what has happened etc
3. Let them know what you can or can't do in relation to the issue
 - This is not something I can make a decision about and I will get our manager to ring you tomorrow/on Monday
 - I can't do anything today but I will make sure it is dealt with first thing tomorrow/Monday etc
4. Conclude so that the patient is clear the interaction is over
 - Thank you again for bringing this to our attention. If you take a seat now the doctor will see you as soon as possible / we will be in touch in the morning etc

Suggestions for responding when patient behaviour is inappropriate and/or offensive:

1. State very clearly that what they are saying/ doing is not acceptable. Do not ask them not to do it or use please. Both imply they will be doing you a favour. You are making a statement not a request. It is really important to be clear and direct
 - Do not swear at me
 - It's not ok to use language like that when you are talking to me
 - What you are doing/saying is offensive and / or against the law – if you don't stop I will call the police
2. If necessary, repeat the above once only, and if you need to repeat it be clear about the consequences if the behaviour continues. If you repeat yourself more than once you are giving a message that you are not serious. The point of repeating yourself is to tell them what will happen if the behaviour continues
 - If you swear at me / use that language again I will call security

3. Do not engage in discussion or conversation with them
 - I have work to do and cannot talk with you
 - I do not want to have a conversation with you. I will book you in/invoice you but I will not converse with you
4. Repeat the above once only if necessary, and as in 2 above, give the consequences if the behaviour continues
 - I cannot talk with you. If you continue to try and talk I will just ignore you / move away / ask someone else to process your booking / invoice etc
5. Once you have told them you will not talk with them, DON'T. That is where it ends

Key Points

- If you don't mean it don't say it
- Make statements instead of asking questions
- Say it once, say it second time with consequences, then act
- L.A.S.T: Listen, Apologise, Solve, Thank them

Remember

- Nothing is guaranteed to work but some things are more likely than others
- Practice using words and phrases so they are familiar
- Take note of how often you ask questions instead of making statements in general life – it's something women tend to do. Think about what you want to say – are you really asking a favour or is this a situation for a statement