

Case: 201102884, A Dental Practice in the Lothian NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: not upheld, action taken by body to remedy, recommendations

Summary

Ms C attended a dental practice for the first time. She said she was still waiting fifteen minutes after the appointment time, and that no one had told her that there would be a delay or explained it to her. She said that there were staff around the reception area who could have done so, including the practice manager. Ms C said that after approaching and speaking to some staff members she decided to leave without seeing the dentist and without registering as a patient. She also had some complaints about the practice's handling of her subsequent written complaint about her experience.

The practice's account of events on the day was that, without waiting for Ms C to approach them, they had told her of the delay and apologised. They said that the various members of staff who had been involved all considered her behaviour to have been difficult, and the records had been noted to the effect that she would not be accepted as a patient if she decided to come back.

Regarding their complaints handling, they said they had tried to reply to the complaint by telephone but that Ms C had not wanted to speak to them.

Although we considered the note in the records to be quite strong evidence, we could not establish sufficient facts to decide between the two contradictory accounts of what happened on the day. In the absence of firm evidence one way or the other, we could not uphold the complaint about those events. The practice, however, told us they now displayed a sign on the wall, saying that if a patient was waiting more than ten minutes after their appointment time, they should tell reception staff. We considered this to be a constructive approach to the complaint.

Our investigation found that the specific issues in Ms C's complaint had been reasonably handled. It is acceptable practice to try to reply to complaints by telephone, although when this did not work out, the practice should have sent a

written reply. However, at that point Ms C had telephoned us for advice, we had contacted the practice to request that they reply, and a reply was then promptly sent. We did not consider that further action by us was needed. We did note that the complaint reply contained very little information about the investigation that had been carried out and very little explanation of the practice's conclusions. We did not consider that this gave us sufficient grounds to uphold the complaint, but we did make a recommendation to the practice about this.

Recommendation

We recommended that the practice:

- ensure that written complaint replies contain a reasonable amount of information about how the complaint investigation was done and how the conclusion was reached.