

# Ready, Set, Go: Know Your Risks

## Leadership Tool for a Learning Organization

# Managing Patient Complaints and Grievances

### WHY IS MANAGEMENT OF PATIENT COMPLAINTS AND GRIEVANCES IMPORTANT?

- Patients underreport unhappiness with their healthcare,<sup>1</sup> and although only 50% of unhappy customers complain to service providers, 96% tell at least nine friends or family members about a negative experience.<sup>2</sup>
- Complaints about clinical issues—“a proxy for risk of lawsuits”—are not random or circumstantial. Rather, they are distributed among a minority of providers and indicative of variation in professional performance that is associated with clinical complications and risk of malpractice claims.<sup>3</sup>
- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and private accrediting organizations require effective systems and processes for addressing patient complaints and grievances.
- Although these standards are well established, transparency of patient satisfaction—or lack thereof—has evolved significantly in recent years; online reviews, whether captured by the organization, an independent entity, or through social media, are now part of how many patients choose providers.
- Proactive management of complaints using service recovery techniques can keep small issues from becoming big problems, and mitigate a host of risk management concerns; complaint and grievance data also yield valuable information for quality improvement initiatives.

### DID YOU ASK?

- How effectively does the organization’s complaint and grievance process capture and resolve all patient concerns?
- What is the organization’s average turnaround time for responding to patient grievances?
- Are physicians and staff skilled in communicating with dissatisfied patients and family members (e.g., able to listen nondefensively, show empathy, handle emotion, and follow through)?
- Does the organization analyze data from complaints and grievances to facilitate quality improvement?

1 Levin CM, Hopkins J. Creating a patient complaint capture and resolution process to incorporate best practices for patient-centered representation. *Jt Comm J Qual Patient Saf* 2014 Nov;40(11):484-92. PubMed: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26111366>

2 Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). Service recovery programs. 2015 July [cited 2016 Jul 13]. <http://www.ahrq.gov/cahps/quality-improvement/improvement-guide/6-strategies-for-improving/customer-service/strategy6p-service-recovery.html>

3 Pichert JW, Moore IN, Karrass J, Jay JS, Westlake MW, Catron TF, Hickson GB. An intervention model that promotes accountability: peer messengers and patient/family complaints. *Jt Comm J Qual Patient Saf* 2013 Oct;39(10):435-46. [http://www.jointcommissioninternational.org/assets/1/7/Journal\\_Oct\\_2013-pichert\\_436-446.pdf](http://www.jointcommissioninternational.org/assets/1/7/Journal_Oct_2013-pichert_436-446.pdf)

### Need More Information?

As a member of ECRI’s risk and patient safety program, you and your staff can access guidance outlining strategies for managing patient grievances and complaints:

- ▶ [Guidance: Managing Patient Complaints and Grievances](#)
- ▶ [Self-Assessment Questionnaire: Managing Patient Complaints and Grievances](#)

ECRI can help you with all of your patient safety, quality, and risk management projects. Email us today at [HealthSystemRM@ecri.org](mailto:HealthSystemRM@ecri.org).



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