

The Filey Surgery Violent and Abusive Patient Policy

Introduction

The NHS has a zero-tolerance policy of all violence and aggression. This policy is for the protection of all NHS staff, but also for the protection of other patients, their families, visitors, etc. In order to ensure that this zero-tolerance approach is adhered to, it is essential to have robust policies and procedures in place. In General Practice, this will need to cover a variety of situations in which incidents could occur.

Objectives

The aims and objectives of this policy are as follows:

- To ensure adequate processes are in place for the protection of staff and patients
- To ensure staff are fully aware of their responsibilities when dealing with ¹violent or aggressive patients
- To ensure that staff are fully aware of their rights when they have to deal with such incidents

Definition of Terms

Violence

Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work.

Physical Assault

The intentional application of force to another person, without lawful justification, resulting in physical injury or personal discomfort.

Non-physical assault

The use of inappropriate words or behaviours causing distress and/or constituting harassment.

Aggression

Behaviour that is hostile, aggressive and/or violent.

Unacceptable behaviour

Behaviour that is offensive, inconsiderate or unreasonable. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Bullying or intimidation
- Patronising, demeaning or belittling behaviours and/or comments

Aggressive patient

This is a patient (or relative) who exhibits one or more of the following patterns of behaviour:

- Verbally abusive, offensive, or intimidating in their behaviour towards staff
 - Threatening physical violence
 - Making excessive demands and/or maintaining certain expectations and failing to accept that these are unreasonable (e.g. wanting an immediate appointment and becoming aggressive when this is not possible)
 - Insisting that a member of staff is dismissed
 - Insisting that treatment is carried out on demand
 - Constantly requesting a different GP
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Dealing with an aggressive patient

Patients can become aggressive for a variety of reasons, and it is always advisable to try to calm down the situation as early as possible, as this may prevent an incident.

An aggressive incident

If a patient does become aggressive, then the following procedure should be used:

- If they continue with their aggressive behaviour, then tell them that they will not be dealt with until they calm down.
- Remain calm and clear and keep repeating that the behaviour is unacceptable. Insist that you are trying to help but cannot do so until they calm down.
- In the interests of safety, it is best to stay accompanied by another member of staff. Staff should never isolate themselves with a potentially violent patient.
- Get a more senior member of staff to speak to the patient, again keeping calm and stressing that you are trying to help.
- Following the incident, the main points should be recorded in a significant incident form.
- All incidents of violent and aggressive behaviours should be reported to the practice manager.

Dealing with Violent patients at the reception

Dealing with a violent patient requires a much more immediate response. As soon as a patient turns violent, then immediate action must be taken as follows:

- Press the panic button
- Step back from the desk
- Lock the reception door
- Phone the police. Once violence occurs, it becomes a crime.
- If there are other patients in the vicinity, then there is a duty to protect them. If possible, remove or instruct other patients in the vicinity to another room away from the situation.

Dealing with violent patient in the consulting room

- The clinician should press the panic button, and if possible, should proceed to the door
- Other members of staff must immediately respond to the room to provide assistance.
- A member of staff should call the police.
- If there are other patients in the vicinity, they should be removed to another area.

Reporting of Incidents

Internal reporting

All incidents are to be reported to the practice manager at the earliest opportunity. The practice manager will ensure that any subsequent reporting action is taken.

Investigation

The practice manager will investigate the incident. If the abuse was by telephone, the investigation will include listening to the call. The practice manager will report the incident to the partners who will agree the action required.

Record keeping

If a patient is given a warning, this will be entered on the patient's healthcare record, stating factually that a warning letter has been given. The letter will be stored separately as it does not relate to medical care and could prejudice future care.

If a patient is removed from the practice list, this will be stated factually in the patient's healthcare² record that removed due to unacceptable behaviour.

Staff support

The member of staff who was subjected to violence or aggression will need support, even though they do not recognise this fact immediately. The way this support is handled can often make the difference to the way the staff member is able to deal with what has happened, with minimal adverse effects. The line manager and the practice management team will be required to support all staff members following any incident, no matter how small they may seem. The staff member should be encouraged to talk about the incident from their perspective and encouraged to write it down. The staff member should be asked what support they feel they need to help them deal with the situation.

If the practice manager is the person affected, then a GP or practice nurse should do this. If the person affected is not an employee of the practice (e.g., a health trainer) then their line manager should be immediately informed after the incident.

When a violent patient joins the practice

Because of the length of time it takes for patient notes to come from the Primary Care support office, it is possible that a new patient could join the practice, and only after several weeks would you discover that they have been violent in a previous practice.

In the event of this happening, it is advisable to write to the patient, to notify them that you are aware of the previous incident, and that if there is any instance of violence or aggression within your own practice, then the patient would be removed from the list.

Summary

Assaults on NHS staff occur everyday across England; healthcare workers are four times more likely to experience work-related violence and aggression than other workers. Effective risk assessment and incident reporting will support the practice in the appropriate management of the offenders, thereby reducing risks to staff, contractors and patients alike.
