



Patient Care Quality Office

Suite 202, 601 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC V5Z 4C2

Patient Care Quality Office Toll Free: 1-888-875-3256
www.phsa.ca

Introduction

In 2008, the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) established a central Patient Care Quality Office (PCQO) to receive, investigate and respond to patient care quality complaints. Our PCQO assists the public in navigating the health system, and supports health authority staff in managing complaints at the time and place they occur.

The PCQO's operations are guided by the *Patient Care Quality Review Board Act* and associated Ministerial Directives. The PCQO generates reports for PHSA's executive, for the Patient Care Quality Review Boards, and for the Ministry of Health.

The legislation also established six Patient Care Quality Review Boards (one aligned with each health authority) to review complaints not resolved at the health authority level. The Boards are independent from the health authority and are accountable to the Minister of Health.

This electronic guide answers commonly asked questions, provides tips to assist staff in addressing point-of-care or local level complaints, and informs readers how and when to attempt local level resolution and when to redirect a complaint to the Patient Care Quality Office. Readers will learn about the Patient Care Quality Review Board and how to work with the Patient Care Quality Office on both complaint files and inquiries.

The Patient Care Quality Office staff work for and with PHSA Agencies and their care teams. It is the intent to partner when assistance is needed for local level resolution or to collaborate with agency teams when the complaint is being managed at the Patient Care Quality Office.

We welcome your feedback on this material and we invite you to contact us at anytime. The PCQO main office is located at Suite 202, 601 West Broadway in Vancouver, BC and can be reached by calling 1-888-875-3256 or emailing pcqo@phsa.ca.

Sincerely,

The Patient Care Quality Office team

PHSA Patient Care Quality Office (PCQO)

Questions, Answers and Tips

“A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction when an expectation is not met. Although it may appear trivial from a health organization’s perspective, it is a very real problem to the complainant and should be taken seriously. Complaining is a patient/resident/client/customer’s right and the health care organization has the responsibility to inform its customers how to complain.”

- Health Association of BC



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Patient Care Quality Review Board (PCQRB) Act - Background

In 2008, government introduced the *Patient Care Quality Review Board Act* (the Act) to establish a clear, consistent, timely and transparent patient complaints process throughout British Columbia.

Under the Act, each of B.C.'s six health authorities created a central Patient Care Quality Office (PCQO) to receive and respond to patient care quality complaints within a mandated timeframe.

In addition to the central PCQO, the Provincial Health Services Authority has established a PCQO to handle care quality complaints that pertain to the BC Ambulance Service (BCAS).

The Act also established six independent Patient Care Quality Review Boards (the Boards) to review complaints not resolved at the health authority level. After completing a review, the Boards may make recommendations to the health authorities and/or the Minister of Health to improve the quality of patient care and the complaints process.

The Boards are required to report the outcome of all case reviews, including any recommendations to improve care quality, to the health authority board, the complainant, the PCQO and the Minister of Health.

For more information, or to see a copy of the Act, please visit <http://www.patientcarequalityreviewboard.ca/>

What is a patient “care quality” complaint?

A “care quality complaint” is a complaint made by or on behalf of the individual to whom the health care or service was delivered or not delivered.

The complaint must pertain to:

- ▶ The delivery of, or the failure to deliver, health care;
- ▶ The quality of health care delivered;
- ▶ The delivery of, or the failure to deliver, a service relating to health care;
- ▶ The quality of any service relating to health care



Quality health care is important to all of us. A new process in B.C. provides patients with the opportunity to better resolve concerns and further improve the quality of the health care system.

What is an external complaint?

An “external complaint” is a care quality complaint that relates to another health authority or should be processed by another entity (e.g. College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC) or is included in the External Complaint Regulation (e.g. child care or involuntary admissions under the Mental Health Act.)

How Does PHSA PCQO work with the Ministry of Health (MoH) Client Relations?

- ▶ The MoH Client Relations program is independent from the PCQO/PCQRB complaints handling process. However, in order to provide a single entry system, Client Relations works with the appropriate PCQO when handling complaints or inquiries that require either information or a response from a health authority.
- ▶ When MOH needs further information in order to respond to an inquiry or complaint, MOH Client Relations determines which health authority PCQO should be contacted.
- ▶ The PCQOs coordinate this process by logging every point of contact, tracking the requests, and determining trends. Corporate communications is included if there is potential media involvement.
- ▶ The single point of entry reduces the number of people approached in one agency with the same questions and increases the likelihood of consistency and accuracy in the responses.

Process:

1. MoH’s inquiries are submitted in writing to the PCQO with applicable details and timeline. MoH’s Client Relations Officer if urgent or required for a Minister’s response may place a 24-48 hour time frame on the inquiry response.
2. PCQO’s determine the correct agency contact person/lead to assist with response and includes corporate communications if there is potential media involvement.
3. Agency contacts secure the response materials and submit to PCQO as time line permits.
4. PCQO with communications formulates the final response with the information secured from the agency contacts/leads.
5. Final response is shared with all participants and PCQO tracks response and response participants in the Patient Safety and Learning System (PSLS).
6. PCQO reports all MoH inquiries received in monthly reports to MoH.

Provincial Patient Care Quality Working Group

The Provincial Patient Care Quality Working Group (the Working Group) engages in ongoing dialogue regarding complaints management, operational issues and troubleshooting, reporting, and other matters related to the *Patient Care Quality Review Board Act*. The Working Group meets every second month and is comprised of the PCQO lead from each health authority and representatives from the Ministry of Health’s Health Authority Relations and Corporate Services Branch. This branch is responsible for the Health Liaison Officers, and provides administrative support for the Patient Care Quality Program. Our meetings ensure we are operating within the legislation, consistently, transparently and cooperatively across BC. They also provide a forum for information sharing and quality improvement across the health authorities.

PHSA Patient Care Quality Office - Questions & Answers

Q: How does this Act impact PHSA?

A: The Act requires each health authority's care complaint process to be standardized, timely and accountable. That process must be consistent and easy to access. Each health authority established a PCQO. The PCQO is responsible for the complaint process and to ensure the health authority is aligned with the requirements of the Act and follows the procedures described by the Minister, including tracking and trending complaints so that quality improvements may be made.

Q: Where should patients go to resolve their complaints?

A: Care complaints are best addressed by the area in which the service was provided at the time a concern arises (e.g. hospital unit, emergency department, and clinic). If complainants are not comfortable addressing their concerns with the person who provided the service, or wish to make a formal care quality complaint, they should contact the PCQO.

Q: What if the care complaint cannot be resolved at the point of care or service delivery area?

A: Complainants should be directed to the PCQO office. Brochures and contact information are provided in the service delivery areas.

Q: What if a complainant takes their complaint to a Vice President or President's Office?

A: Patients who take their complaint to the Vice President or President's Office will be redirected to the PCQO.

Q: Is there a requirement to resolve complaints within a certain time frame?

A: The PCQO must acknowledge receipt of complaints in two (2) business days and complete the investigation within 30 business days. Complainants must be informed of the outcome of the investigation within 10 business days of completion. However, timeframes may be extended by mutual agreement between the PCQO and the complainant. The complainant must be kept informed throughout the review process.

Q: How are contracted agencies impacted by the Act?

A: The Act covers health care services or services relating to health care that are under the jurisdiction of health authorities. This includes contracted services such as housekeeping, food services, parking, security, etc. Services or complaints relating to child care or the involuntary admission of a person under the *Mental Health Act* are considered external and are excluded from the Act.

Q: Are complaints about residential care facilities covered by the Act?

A: Residential care facilities licensed or funded by health authorities are covered by the Act. People who wish to complain about care received in a residential care facility are first encouraged to contact the facility administrator who will make every effort to resolve the complaint.

A complaint regarding a breach of the *Resident's Bill of Rights* is considered a care quality complaint and can be brought to the health authority's Patient Care Quality Office and, if not resolved, to a Patient Care Quality Review Board for review.

Q: Does the Act make the health authorities and government more accountable to the treatment of patients in hospitals and residents and clients in community settings?

A: Yes. The Act facilitates a consistent, timely and transparent care quality complaint process, as well as a process to recommend improvements to the quality of publicly delivered health care services in British Columbia.

Q: How can a complainant find the Provincial Health Services' Patient Care Quality Office, which serves all agencies of PHSA including the BC Ambulance Service?

A: Complaints can be submitted either in writing (e-mail, fax or letter), via telephone or in person. Anonymous complaints cannot be investigated.

Address: Suite 202 – 601 West Broadway Street
Vancouver, BC | V5Z 4C2

Telephone: 604-875-3256

Toll Free: 1-888-875-3256 (*listen to prompts please*)

Fax: 604-829-2631

Website: <http://www.phsa.ca>

Email: PCQO@phsa.ca

Hours: Monday to Friday (excluding statutory holidays) 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

Q: What if someone has a complaint regarding fees for ambulance services?

A: Complaints regarding ambulance fees are handled through the Ambulance Billing Appeals process. Forms are available on the BCAS website: www.bcas.ca.

They can also be contacted at:

Address: Ambulance Billing
PO Box 9676 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9P7

Telephone: (250) 356-0052 (toll free)

Toll Free: 1-800-665-7199

s. 6(1)(c) Ministerial Directive - A health authority must ensure its PCQO:

1. Provides the means to receive written complaints by mail, fax and electronically;
2. Provides the means to receive verbal complaints in person and by telephone, including via a toll-free telephone number and after-hours voicemail;
3. Provides reasonable assistance to complainants needing help with the submission of a written or verbal complaint; and
4. In the case of a complainant who intends to submit a written complaint, but is unable to do so, the PCQO must be reasonably available to record the complaint on the complainant's behalf.

Patient Care Quality Review Boards

There are six Patient Care Quality Review Boards (the Boards) in total – one for each health authority region and one for the Provincial Health Services Authority. The review boards are independent of the health authorities and are accountable to the Minister of Health.

The Boards receive and review [care quality complaints](#) that have first been addressed by a health authority's Patient Care Quality Office and remain unresolved. Upon completion of a review, the boards may make recommendations to the Minister of Health and the health authorities for improving the quality of patient care in British Columbia.

The review boards are supported by a common administrative body called the Secretariat, which is currently based in Victoria. The Secretariat works on behalf of the Boards to receive and process requests from people wishing for a review of their complaint. The Secretariat also acts as the liaison between the Boards, the health authorities, and the Minister of Health.

For more information about the Boards, please visit www.patientcarequalityreviewboard.ca

Q: What are the Patient Care Quality Review Boards?

A: The Patient Care Quality Review Boards are independent bodies accountable to the Minister of Health. They register all complaints and address those complaints which could not be resolved through the PCQO. The Boards provide an independent review of unresolved complaints. They prepare complaint reports and make recommendations to the Minister and the health authorities regarding the resolution of individual complaints and ways to improve quality of care.

Q: What do the Review Boards do that health authorities don't do on their own?

A: The Boards provide an independent review of care quality complaints and how they were handled by the health authority. Complainants are able to approach the Board to review a decision of the health authority if s/he is not satisfied with how the complaint was handled.

The Boards also report the outcome of individual case reviews, including any recommendations, to the health authority and the Minister. The Boards provide patients, residents and clients with more choice in how they wish to have their complaints handled.

Q: Are patients, residents and clients able to skip seeking resolution of their issues at the health authority level and complain directly to the Review Boards?

A: No, the Boards can only review complaints that have first been addressed by a PCQO, unless otherwise directed by the Minister. If complainants feel their concerns have not been addressed to their satisfaction at the health authority level, the independent review boards can then be engaged.

Q. Do the Boards report publicly on their findings in each case?

A: No, the Boards do not publicly report their findings in each individual case. They are required to report publicly to the Minister on an annual basis.

Q: Do the Boards have access to patients', residents' and clients' private medical information?

A: The parameters of the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act and the Patient Care Quality Review Board Act apply. Personal health information is disclosed only in accordance with the provisions of the Acts. When a complainant is having their complaint file reviewed they understand the information will be accessed and consent to the process.



We all want a quality health care system – one that provides us with appropriate, consistent and timely care; is transparent and accountable; and that treats every patient with respect and dignity.

Q: Are health authorities required to act on recommendations from the Review Boards?

A: Health authorities will carefully consider recommendations made to them regarding care or service issues. The health authority must formally respond to each recommendation and if required, the Minister can direct the health authorities to act on particular recommendations.

Q: What kinds of complaints do the Review Boards consider?

- A: Review boards consider:
- ▶ Complaints about the quality of any health care service under the jurisdiction of the health authorities. (These complaints must first have been addressed by a health authority PCQO.)
 - ▶ Complaints about services expected but not delivered by the health authority.
 - ▶ Complaints not addressed by the Patient Care Quality Office within 40 business days.
 - ▶ Matters directed by the Minister of Health.

Q: What kind of complaints will the Review Boards *not* consider (external complaints)?

- A: Review boards will *not* consider care quality complaints regarding:
- ▶ Health professionals providing services in private practice, where the services are funded by MSP or PharmaCare (e.g. general practitioner and pharmacist services);
 - ▶ Health care or related services that are paid for entirely by the patient, or by the patient and a private insurer (e.g. dental care, alternative therapies, fully private pay home support);
 - ▶ Health care or services provided in privately funded surgical centres or facilities, unless these are provided under contract with a health authority;
 - ▶ Health care or services provided by HealthLink BC, such as Nurse Line, Dial-a-Dietician and BC Bedline, where the services are funded by the Ministry of Health;

- ▶ Health care or services provided by HealthLink BC, such as Nurse Line, Dial-a-Dietician and BC Bedline, where the services are funded by the Ministry of Health;
- ▶ Child care complaints;
- ▶ Complaints about assisted living services that were not provided by a health authority;
- ▶ Complaints about involuntary admissions under the *Mental Health Act*;
- ▶ Complaints about a decision of a Medical Health Officer or delegate under the *Community Care and Assisted Living Act*; and
- ▶ Complaints about a decision of the Community Care and Assisted Living Act Appeal Board.

Q: Do the Review Boards consider complaints about physicians or other health professionals?

A: If a Review Board receives a complaint about a physician or other health professional contracted to or employed by a health authority to provide services (e.g. within a hospital) the Board will assess the nature of the complaint to determine whether it is the most appropriate body to conduct a review. If another body is more appropriate to review the complaint, the Review Board may redirect the complainant to that body. For example, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC and the College of Registered Nurses of BC both consider complaints regarding breaches of professional conduct. Similarly, the Emergency Medical Assistant (EMA) Licensing Board reviews complaints about EMAs (paramedics) *The Patient Care Quality Review Board Act* do not replace the complaint investigation authority of professional bodies.

Q: What is the internal process of the Patient Care Quality Review Board?

1. The PCQRB are supported by an administrative body called the Secretariat, which works on behalf of the Boards to receive review requests, gather information from the PCQO, and prepare a complaint case report for the Board's review. The Secretariat is the primary liaison between the review boards, the PCQOs and the Ministry.
2. If you would like the review board to review your complaint, you must submit a review request form or call 1-866-952-2448. Your complaint must first have been addressed by a health authority PCQO.
3. Once the Review Board receives your request, you will receive written confirmation within five business days that your request has been received and that your complaint is within the review board's jurisdiction.
4. If your complaint is a matter within the Review Board's jurisdiction, the health authority Patient Care Quality Office will be notified that a review will be conducted into your complaint, and will be asked to provide a copy of the information relating to your complaint.
5. The Secretariat will gather all the relevant facts and background information regarding your complaint, and will forward this information to a panel of review board members for their consideration. The panel may then ask the Secretariat to gather additional information, and it may also interview stakeholders and/or seek professional advice from experts.
6. The Review Board is expected to complete its review within a maximum of 120 business days. If the review cannot be completed within that timeframe, both you and the health authority will be notified.
7. Once the review is complete, the Review Board will send you and the health authority a final report. If recommendations have been made by the review board following its review of your complaint, a copy of these will also be sent to the Minister of Health Services so that the

ministry and health authority can work together to consider the implementation of those recommendations.

8. The health authority will also contact you to discuss the Review Board's final report.
9. If you are not satisfied with the resolution of your complaint through the Patient Care Quality Office and Patient Care Quality Review Board process, you may bring your concerns to the attention of the B.C. Ombudsperson. Please note that the role of the Ombudsperson is to identify issues of administrative unfairness or causes of recurring unfairness. The Ombudsperson will investigate your concerns to ensure that you have been treated fairly by the Boards. For more information, please visit the B.C. Ombudsperson's website at: www.ombud.gov.bc.ca

Q: How do people request a review by a review board?

A: A review can be requested by sending a completed review request form by mail, fax or email to the PCQRB. Review request forms can be found at <http://www.patientcarequalityreviewboard.ca/requestreview.html>. If you are unable to submit a written request, you can call the PCQRB and a Review Board Officer will complete the form on your behalf.

Mail: Patient Care Quality Review Board
PO Box 9643
Victoria, BC V8W 9V1
Toll-free: 1-866-952-2448
Fax: 250-952-2428
Email: contact@patientcarequalityreviewboard.ca

Q: What is a section 51 review under the Evidence Act and why won't Patient Care Quality Review Boards be able to access that information in their review?

A: Under the Patient Care Quality Review Board Act, the Boards cannot access Section 51 information. Section 51 of the Evidence Act governs Quality Assurance Committees in hospitals and health facilities where health professionals such as physicians, dentists and pharmacists practice. These committees may be established by a facility's board of management for the purpose of improving medical care or practice in the facility. Section 51 states that records produced to these committees for the investigation or evaluation of a complaint or inquiry must not be disclosed in a legal or similar proceeding. A Section 51 review is by law an internal review which may produce findings that cannot be accessed by Patient Care Quality Review Boards or other bodies. Review Boards, however, may access aggregate data that track the number of complaints that were forwarded to Quality Assurance Committees for review as well as the number of complaints that were resolved at that level. Review Boards may make recommendations on complaints data trends to the Minister.

Q: Who can I contact if I have further questions?

A: Please contact the Patient Care Quality Office:
Address: Suite 202 – 601 West Broadway St Vancouver, BC | V5Z 4C2
Toll Free: 1-888-875-3256
Fax: 604-829-2631
Email: pcqo@phsa.ca
Website: <http://www.phsa.ca>

Complaint Management

Care quality concerns are best addressed where and when the care took place. A person with concerns or complaint (complainant) has a right to have care issues addressed and questions answered.

- ▶ The sooner an issue is managed the better.
- ▶ When faced with conflict and or a complaint we may be unsure how to respond. Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) Patient Care Quality Office (PCQO) offers the following tips on what to do when faced with conflict or hearing a complaint.

Responding to a complaint in person:

Complaints are always best addressed where the service/care was provided.

- ▶ Encourage the complainant to speak to someone in that program area or unit.
- ▶ Offer directions find a phone number or determine a contact person while the complainant is with you.
- ▶ Take the complainant's information down.
- ▶ Avoid offering excuses, an opinion and comparisons.
- ▶ Provide assurance that there will be follow up by those who may have more information. A solution or resolution cannot be promised but you can promise a response.
- ▶ Sometimes a complainant needs only to be heard and the complaint can be managed with greater ease, when a concern is relayed to a good listener.
- ▶ Sometimes a care complaint is very serious and we need to know when a care issue requires a wider audience to work through the specifics and respond appropriately.
- ▶ Patients should know what all the complaint management options are for their care quality concerns.



Complaints are best addressed and resolved at the time and place they occur.

H.E.A.R a Complaint

H: Hear the person - Listen carefully.

E: Empathize - "I know how frustrating this must be".

A: Adopt a helpful attitude - "I don't have all the answers but I will find someone who does to help you or follow up with you".

R: Remain calm - The calmer you are, the calmer they will become.

If the complaint is about you;

- ▶ Say less, listen more.
- ▶ Consider the issue/event from the complainant's perspective.
- ▶ Try not to become defensive or engaged in debate.

When a complaint is about you it can be difficult to be objective.

- ▶ Offer the complainant the opportunity to speak to someone other than you.
- ▶ If agreeable with the complainant, redirect to your supervisor or a colleague.

If faced with someone who is angry while sharing their complaint with you, buy time to gather thoughts and to be in a calmer space to receive the information.

- ▶ Ask the complainant to hold their thoughts for a moment while you go together to a quieter place.
- ▶ Ask for a moment to find pen and paper to take notes.
- ▶ Appreciation for the complainant for the time and energy it takes to launch a complaint often goes a long way to reduce tension.

Note: Taking two minutes before immediately dealing with any conflict can give everyone the chance to catch their breath and gather some perspective.

If the complaint feels bigger than you and you feel you may not be the person to address the complaint;

- ▶ Apologize, say you don't have the answers but you can still help.
- ▶ Redirect to someone who may have the answers, or to the PCQO, or
- ▶ Take the complainant's contact information down and a summary of their complaint with sincere assurance that there will be follow up, and contact the PCQO.

Responding to a complaint by email:

If a complaint has come by email;

- ▶ Before you respond reflect on what is being asked and who should be involved in the response.
- ▶ Take the time on this end of the complaint cycle to consider the best response.
- ▶ Impulse responses may be inappropriate and once an email is sent to the complainant this is a permanent document.
- ▶ If there is a telephone number, try a conversation with the complainant first as email tone is often misinterpreted.

Responding to a complaint by letter:

Letters being sent out by any PHSA agency representative can be coordinated with partners who may be able to assist with the best response. Communication Leaders, Risk leads, agency Executive and or the Patient Care Quality Office can assist with a response by letter.

Letters, once sent are also a permanent record, therefore ensuring they are accurate and appropriate is important.

Empathetic Responses:

The PCQO has adopted the following as core principles for developing empathetic response letters:

- *Responsive*
 - Acknowledge and respond to each of the complainant's concerns.
- *Accurate*
 - Give the complainant a specific, thorough, and factual account of how each concern was addressed.
- *Respectful*
 - Show consideration for the complainant.
- *Compassionate*
 - Recognize and acknowledge the complainant's emotions and experiences.
- *Accessible*
 - Help the complainant access – and understand – information.

How can the Patient Care Quality Office (PCQO) help your agency, program or care team?

1. The PCQO will provide your program area with posters and brochures for your patients and clients.
2. If you have a complaint and you are unsure about the best way to address the concerns call the PCQO for advice.
3. If you have a complaint that cannot be resolved at the point of care redirect the complainant to the PCQO.
4. If your team or program area would like a mini workshop on care quality complaint management, please call to arrange a free session that can be held at your agency, on your unit or in your program area. For distant clinics, teleconferences and video conferencing may also be an option.

We are here to help.

Provincial Health Services Authority - Patient Care Quality Office

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