

MEDICINES INFORMATION & ADVICE ALERT

ISSUE 2

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IRMIS Alert
Learning from Practice

Challenging situations can add unnecessary pressures and lead to errors

Background

- Challenging situations can add unnecessary pressures for staff dealing with a medicines question. This can lead to an increase in risk of near misses or errors.
- Not knowing how to deal with these situations can impact on staff morale and wellbeing.

Why do we think it happened?

- There is no single cause for a challenging situation, but common reasons are the environment, health problems, transfer of pressures, and frustration.
- Challenging situations may arise from service users who are for example: angry, abusive, evasive, talkers, confused, demanding, inappropriate.
- The service user may have unrealistic expectations of your service.

Actions

- Basic tip is to focus on problem-solving in a **calm and professional** way:
- **Listen:** let the person vent their feelings and actively listen over the phone. Take notes.
- **Apologise:** express sympathy that they are upset and apologise for the experience they've had.
- **Acknowledge:** repeat the problem they are calling with to show that you listened and are taking them seriously.
- **Clarify:** understand the detail so that you fully understand the issues. Remember the user may have said it all before to someone else.
- **Respond:** be honest and say what you can do for them to help. Be realistic with your time scale.
- **What can you do:** focus on what you can do for them instead of quoting policy or saying what you can't do.
- **Tone:** take the user seriously and be upbeat and positive when responding.
- **Empathise:** with their situation and be realistic in your help.
- **Thank:** for raising an issue that needs escalation or review.

When it happens:

Angry users

- Listen, don't interrupt. Acknowledge. Clarify. Apologise and empathise. Say what you can do. Check the user understands and accepts the actions you will take.

Abusive users

- Everyone is entitled to respect. Let the caller know that if the abuse does not stop then you will terminate the call. Take notes. Report the user as per your Trust policy.

Evasive users

- Reassure confidentiality of service. Find out why requested information not being disclosed. If insufficient information to approach enquiry, then consider refusing and signposting.

Persistent talkers

- Tell the caller that you must go as other people are waiting. Advise the caller that you need to start work on their question. Tell the caller you have a meeting to attend or need to take another call.

Confused users (fail to understand)

- Don't raise your voice. Ask if someone else is available for you to talk to. Will a written response help? Would the caller benefit from face-to-face counselling, e.g., community pharmacist. Is an interpreter needed? Do you need to escalate to another healthcare professional involved in their care?

Demanding users

- Say you don't know the answer off the top of your head. Explain the need for more research and the risk from guessing an answer. Tell them you'll start looking into their question as soon as you hang up. Give them an idea of how much research you need to do and agree a realistic timescale.

Inappropriate users

- Remind them of the service remit. Signpost them to the department they should contact. Explain why your service can't assist.

For any challenging situation, get a colleague involved, take notes, and have a timely debrief with your line manager.

When something does go wrong

- Follow your in-house procedure for errors or near misses
- Submit an anonymous report to the UKMi [Incident Reporting in Medicines Information Scheme](#) (IRMIS)
- Learn as a team

For further details, resources and supporting materials see <https://future.nhs.uk/UKMedsInfoNetwk> (registration required).

For any enquiries about this alert, email ORMG.ukmi@nhs.net