Smile Dental Implants

Complaints Policy and Procedure

Responsible Person	Dr Dipesh Patel (Complaints Lead)	**Last Reviewed**	July 2026
Scope	All Patients (NHS & Private)	**Regulatory Compliance**	CQC Regulation 16, UK GDPR, Equality Act 2010

Our Commitment

At Smile Dental Implants, we are committed to providing high-quality dental care to all our patients. We take feedback and complaints seriously and view them as an opportunity to learn, improve our services, and maintain trust and transparency with our patients.

We aim to handle all complaints courteously, efficiently, and promptly so that concerns can be resolved as quickly as possible. The person responsible for handling all complaints in the practice is **Dr Dipesh Patel**.

How to Make a Complaint

We hope that most issues can be resolved quickly and informally, often at the time they arise and with the person concerned. If your concern cannot be resolved this way, or you would prefer to make a formal complaint, you may do so verbally, in writing, or by email.

Complaints Made Verbally

If you make a complaint in person or by telephone, we will listen to your concerns and, where possible, attempt to resolve them immediately. If the Complaints Lead is not available, a team member will record your details and a brief description of your complaint. Your complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days, and arrangements will be made for the Complaints Lead to contact you directly.

Complaints Made in Writing or by Email

Written and emailed complaints will be passed immediately to the Complaints Lead, who will acknowledge receipt within 3 working days of receiving your correspondence.

Complaints Handling Process

The practice follows a structured 8-step framework when managing complaints to ensure consistent oversight and resolution:

Step 1 – Receipt of Complaint: The complaint will be received by a member of staff and passed to the Complaints Lead as soon as possible.

Step 2 – Acknowledgement: The complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days. The complainant will be informed who is handling the complaint and how they can be contacted.

Step 3 – Initial Assessment: The Complaints Lead will review the complaint, identify any immediate risks or concerns, determine whether further information is required, and agree the scope of the investigation.

Step 4 – Investigation: Relevant records, documentation, and staff accounts will be reviewed. Where appropriate, clinical advice may be sought. The complainant may be contacted if clarification or further information is required.

Step 5 – Progress Updates: If the investigation cannot be completed within 10 working days, the complainant will be informed of the reason for the delay and provided with regular updates until the complaint is concluded.

Step 6 – Outcome: The complainant will receive a written response outlining the findings of the investigation, any apology where appropriate, lessons learned, and any actions taken or planned.

Step 7 – Escalation: If the complainant remains dissatisfied, they will be informed of the relevant external organisations available to review their concerns.

Step 8 – Learning and Improvement: The complaint will be reviewed through the practice governance process to identify trends, learning opportunities, and service improvements.

Investigation and Response Timeline

We will make every effort to resolve your complaint within 10 working days of acknowledgment. If the investigation is likely to take longer (for example, where clinical advice is required), we will inform you of the reason for the delay and agree on an updated timescale with you.

If your complaint involves clinical care or treatment, the matter will usually be referred to the treating dentist, unless you specifically request otherwise. Once our investigation is complete, we will contact you via your preferred method (letter, email, or telephone) to share our findings and any actions taken.

Where necessary, we may seek advice from our indemnity provider, insurer, or legal adviser to ensure a fair and compliant response. In such cases, only relevant information will be shared, and confidentiality will be maintained at all times. The Complaints Lead will keep the complainant informed throughout the process and provide progress updates at agreed intervals.

Complaints Involving Senior Management

Where a complaint is made about the Registered Manager, Practice Manager, or another member of the senior management team responsible for handling complaints, the practice will ensure the complaint is managed impartially and without conflict of interest.

In such circumstances, the complaint will be escalated to an alternative senior person within the organisation (e.g., Clinical Director, Practice Owner, or Deputy Complaints Lead not involved in the issue). Where no appropriate internal person is available, the complaint may be referred to an external adviser or relevant governing body for independent review. The complainant will be informed of who will be handling their complaint and provided with clear contact details.

Sole Trader Governance & Safeguards

Where the practice operates under a sole trader model where the Principal Dentist holds multiple roles (including Clinical Lead, Registered Manager, and Complaints Lead), the practice recognizes a potential conflict of interest if a

complaint is made about the Principal Dentist. To ensure compliance with CQC Regulation 16 (Receiving and Acting on Complaints), the following safeguards are established:

1. Recognition of Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is recognized if the complaint relates directly to the clinical care, treatment, or professional conduct of the Principal Dentist, or if there is a reasonable perception of bias. In such cases, the Principal Dentist will not act as the sole investigator or decision-maker.

2. Mandatory Escalation to Independent Review

Escalation to an independent reviewer is mandatory if the complaint involves the Principal Dentist directly, clinical decision-making is challenged, the case is high-risk, or the complainant explicitly requests it.

3. Independent Oversight Arrangements

Independent input will be sought through a suitably qualified independent external dental clinician (GDC registered professional colleague) and/or the practice's indemnity provider for comprehensive advice on clinical risk and response content. Under no circumstances will the Principal Dentist act as the sole sign-off authority in complaints where they are the subject.

Data Protection Complaints

Any complaint relating to data protection will be handled strictly in accordance with the UK GDPR and Data Protection Act 2018 requirements. Individuals may raise data protection concerns directly to our Data Protection Lead.

Data Protection Officer / Lead Contact:
Smile Dental Implants, Data Protection Team
Email: [insert contact details]

All data protection complaints will be logged and acknowledged within 3 working days. The concern will be assessed to determine whether it constitutes a personal data breach. Where a breach is identified, the practice will follow its Data Breach Protocol, including reporting to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) within the statutory 72-hour timescale if required.

Individuals have the right to lodge a complaint directly with the ICO at any time:

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
Website: https://www.ico.org.uk
Helpline: 0303 123 1113

Confidentiality & Accessibility

Confidentiality: All complaints are treated in the strictest confidence. Patient records will remain confidential, and only those involved in investigating or resolving your complaint will have access to the necessary information.

Accessible Information: We ensure that patients receive information in formats they can understand and are provided with any communication support they need throughout the complaints process, complying fully with the Equality Act 2010 and The Accessible Information Standards.

Cooperation with Independent Reviews: The practice will cooperate fully with any independent review, investigation, or complaint assessment undertaken by an external organisation, regulator, ombudsman, or indemnity provider.

Time Limits for Making a Complaint

Complaints should normally be made within **12 months** of the incident or the date the issue came to your attention. However, we will always consider reasonable exceptions if there are valid reasons for the delay.

External Escalation and Independent Bodies

If you remain dissatisfied with the practice's internal investigation, you have the right to escalate your concerns to the following independent bodies:

- **Care Quality Commission (CQC):** The CQC does not get directly involved with individual complaints but welcomes feedback to monitor service standards.
  Web: https://www.cqc.org.uk/give-feedback-on-care | Tel: 03000 616161
- **Private Patients - Dental Complaints Service (DCS):** For patients receiving private dental care, the DCS provides free, independent support.
  Web: https://dcs.gdc-uk.org | Tel: 020 8253 0800
- **NHS Patients - Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO):** For patients receiving NHS treatment, complaints can be escalated to the Ombudsman.
  Web: https://www.ombudsman.org.uk | Tel: 0345 015 4033