

ZERO TOLERANCE PRACTICE POLICY

Drafted May 2022 – Stuart Wright (Practice Manager)

Updated – November 2024

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INTRODUCTION

The Practice takes it very seriously if a member of staff or member of the public is treated in an inappropriate, abusive or violent way.

NHS England has updated its guidance on [managing unacceptable patient behaviours](#) to also include non-violent abuse. This states that medical providers and their staff have a right to care for others without fear of being attacked or abused. This guidance seeks to balance ensuring that inappropriate and unacceptable patient behaviours are appropriately managed, ensuring that all patients can access the primary medical services they need, and are entitled to. It also states that inappropriately demanding behaviour or inappropriate use of the service can and should be flagged to patients and is grounds for removal from the practice list should it continue.

Our Practice staff aim to be polite, helpful, and sensitive to all patients' individual needs and circumstances. We would respectfully remind patients that very often staff could be confronted with a multitude of varying, and sometimes difficult, tasks and situations all at the same time. The staff understand that ill patients do not always act in a reasonable manner and will take this into consideration when trying to deal with a misunderstanding or complaint.

However aggressive behaviour, be it violent or abusive, any form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation will not be tolerated and may result in patients being removed from the Practice list and, in extreme cases, the Police being contacted.

We ask you to treat your GPs and their staff courteously at all times. In order for the practice to maintain good relations with patients the practice would like to ask all its patients to read and take note of the types of behaviour that would be found unacceptable:

- Using bad language or swearing at practice staff
- Any physical violence towards any member of the Primary Health Care Team or other patients, such as pushing or shoving
- Verbal abuse towards the staff in any form including verbally insulting the staff
- Racial abuse and sexual harassment will not be tolerated within this practice
- Persistent or unrealistic demands that cause disruption or stress to staff will not be accepted. Requests will be met wherever possible, and explanations given when they cannot
- Causing damage/stealing from the Practice's premises, staff or patients
- Obtaining drugs and/or medical services fraudulently

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The Legal Position

As a responsible employer, the Practice has a duty as a provider of NHS healthcare to protect the health, safety and welfare of staff under the Health & Safety at Work Act. This includes a risk assessment of violence towards staff and taking steps to mitigate this under the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. In addition, the NHS England guidance states that protecting GP teams' mental health is 'as important' as protecting their physical health.

Staff members who are victims of violent conduct or assault have the right to sue their employers for compensation if the risk of violence could have been reduced or removed completely, but the employers did not act upon this information. Being victims of aggression and violence, or other inappropriate behaviour as listed above are examples of this.

Violence at Work

The practice acknowledges that there may be instances where violence and/or aggression forms part of a patient's illness. In these rare circumstances, the issue will be discussed with the patient and form part of their care planning.

This information will be recorded in the patient's medical record and flagged to ensure that members of staff are aware. In addition, where deemed necessary, appropriate support will be put in place, eg. staff members do not see the patient alone.

Definition of Physical and Verbal Abuse and Violence:

Physical and verbal abuse includes:

- Unreasonable and / or offensive remarks or behaviour / rude gestures / innuendoes
- Sexual and racial harassment
- Threatening behaviour (with or without a weapon)
- Actual physical assault (whether or not it results in actual injury) includes being pushed or shoved as well as being hit, punched or attacked with a weapon, or being intentionally struck with bodily fluids or excrement.
- Attacks, physical or verbal, on members of staff or the public
- Discrimination of any kind, which includes (but is not limited to) homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, racism, sexism, ageism, or harassment or abuse on basis of disability, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief.
- Damage to an employee's or employer's property

The Practice supports the Zero Tolerance stance adopted by the NHS.

The HSE (Health and Safety Executive) defines work-related violence as:

"Any incident, in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work".

Violence and aggression towards a person may also be defined as:

"A physical contact with another person which may or may not result in pain or injury. The contact is uninvited and is an attempt to cause harm, injury or to intimidate. Non-physical aggression includes the use of language which causes offence or threatens the safety of a member of staff".

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the practice will also undertake the following measures to ensure a safe work environment:

- Carry out risk assessments to assess and review the duties of employees, identifying any "at risk" situations and taking appropriate steps to reduce or remove the risk to employees, particularly if they are working alone.
- Assess and review the layout of the premises to reduce the risk to employees where physically possible.
- Assess and review the provision of personal safety equipment, such as alarms.
- Develop surgery policies, procedures and guidelines for dealing with physical and verbal abuse.
- Provide support and counselling for victims or refer to suitably qualified health professionals.
- Make employees aware of risks and ensure employee involvement in suitable training courses.
- Record any incidents on a Significant Event form and review such incidents to take any remedial action to ensure similar incidents are prevented in future.

REMOVAL FROM THE PRACTICE LIST

The removal of patients from our list is an exceptional and rare event and is a last resort in an impaired patient-practice relationship. We value and respect good patient-clinician relationships based on mutual respect and trust.

Where a patient has acted inappropriately or unacceptably, the provider will need to carefully consider if the incident 'meets the relevant criteria for removal from the practice patient list'.

In doing so, the practice should consider 'the nature and severity of the incident/behaviour, the impact on practice services, staff or other service users and the patient's own circumstances', and:

- If the incident does meet the relevant criteria for removal from the practice patient list the practice will need to decide whether it is 'nevertheless willing to continue to manage its relationship with the patient or proceed with the removal'.

If the incident does not meet the relevant criteria for removal from the practice patient list, the practice will need to decide 'how it will manage its continuing relationship with the patient'.

A letter may be sent as an initial warning to the patient informing them their behaviour has been deemed inappropriate and will not be tolerated.

An exception to this is in the case of immediate removal on the grounds of violence eg. when the Police are involved.

Removing other members of the household

Because of the possible need to visit patients at home, it may be necessary to terminate responsibility for other members of the family or the entire household to ensure the safety of practice staff.

The prospect of visiting patients in the residence of a relative who is no longer a patient of the practice, or the risk of being regularly confronted by the removed patient, may make it difficult for the practice to continue to look after the whole family. This is more likely where the removed patient has been violent or displayed threatening behaviour and keeping the other family members could put clinical staff at risk.

Zero Tolerance Poster

Zero Tolerance Posters have been made available from CCGs, all throughout Salford. Please see the next page.

**Please don't abuse
or threaten us.**

**Help us focus on
keeping you well
in Salford.**

Salford GP practices have
the right to refuse treatment
and take further action
against anyone who
threatens the safety of
their staff and patients.

#BeKindToGeneralPractice



PRESCRIBING TREATMENTS



TREATING PATIENTS



TAKING ABUSE