

<b>Institutional Handbook of Operating Procedures Policy 09.03.05</b>	
Section: Clinical Policies	Responsible Vice President: Executive Vice President, UTMB Health System
Subject: Patient Rights	Responsible Entity: Patient Services

**I. Title**

*Patient [Grievance](#) Policy*

**II. Policy**

The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston (UTMB) is committed to providing optimal care by collaborating with its patients and creating an open environment of communication in which patients or their representatives feel comfortable expressing a grievance related to the quality of care and services provided to them. These issues will be addressed in a timely and reasonable manner. UTMB strives to ensure that quality care and services are rendered to our patients. If a patient, family member, or visitor believes that they did not receive quality care or services, UTMB will address those concerns and take appropriate action as necessary.

All UTMB employees are required to report [grievances](#) to the Department of Patient Services. We are thankful for, and encourage our patients and their families, to share their feedback should they have concerns, compliments, suggestions, or service needs. These comments allow us to better address areas of concern, make positive changes as needed, and continuously improve the care and services we provide.

**III. Grievance Handling Process**

A copy of the “Guide to Patient Services” is provided for review to all inpatients during their hospitalization. This guide includes contact information for reporting patient concerns. Patient Rights and Responsibilities are posted in common areas of the hospital and outpatient clinics. A detailed version is available on UTMB’s website.

**Patients or their representatives may communicate any complaint or grievance to:**

- Any UTMB employee, who will then contact the Department of Patient Services with the information.
- The Department of Patient Services in person, in writing, or by calling 409-772-4772. Written [grievances](#) may be sent via email to [patient.services@utmb.edu](mailto:patient.services@utmb.edu) or by regular mail to UTMB’s Department of Patient Services, 301 University Blvd, Galveston, Texas 77555-0306.

- The Joint Commission (TJC) directly for patient safety or quality of care issues. This may be done regardless of whether a [grievance](#) was first filed with a UTMB employee or the Department of Patient Services.

Email: [patientsafetyreport@jointcommission.org](mailto:patientsafetyreport@jointcommission.org)

Fax: Office of Quality Monitoring (630) 792-5636

Mail: Office of Quality Monitoring - The Joint Commission  
One Renaissance Blvd- Oakbrook Terrace, IL, 60181

- The Texas Department of Health.  
Fax: (512) 834-6653  
Mail: Health Facility Compliance Group/ MC 1979  
Texas Department of State Health Services  
1100 W. 49th St  
Austin, TX 78756  
Complaint Hotline: 1-888-973-0022
- Medicare beneficiaries with any complaints or [grievances](#) regarding quality of care, coverage decisions, or premature discharge may also contact the Texas Medical Foundation (TMF) <https://www.tmf.org/Company-Information/Contact-TMF>.
- HIPAA violations may also be reported to the Compliance Hotline by calling **(800) 898-7679** or report via the internet at <https://www.reportlineweb.com/UTMB>.

#### **Patient Services responsibilities for investigating a grievance:**

Once a [grievance](#) is received, a patient or their representative will be notified of the patient's rights and informed of the [grievance](#) process, including whom to contact internally regarding their [grievance](#).

See [Addendum A for the Patient Services Grievance/Complaint Process](#) and [Addendum B for the Grievance Policy Workflow](#) (internal document).

#### **Manager/departmental responsibilities for responding to a grievance**

Each department, unit, or clinic manager is accountable for investigating and resolving patient [grievances](#) and for providing the outcome of their investigation in a timely manner in accordance with the Grievance/Complaint Process. The outcome of the investigation will be provided to the patient advocate or handler who is responsible for providing the response to the patient.

#### **IV. Confidentiality**

All records, reports, database information, investigations, and related documents are prepared for quality improvement processes under the Health System Executive Leadership and other medical committees and medical peer review committees within UTMB. As such, this information is confidential, privileged, and protected from discovery and inappropriate disclosure. Employees should not openly discuss grievances that they receive outside of the established grievance process set forth in this policy.

#### **IV. Definitions**

Grievance: A patient grievance is a complaint by a patient or their representative regarding the patient's care, alleged patient abuse or neglect, or issues related to the hospital's compliance with the Center for Medicare/Medicaid Services (CMS) Hospital Conditions of Participation or billing practices.

A complaint is considered a grievance when ...

- The complaint is communicated in writing, email, or fax, whether related to an inpatient or an outpatient encounter. Letters from patients attached to UTMB patient satisfaction survey responses, specifically requesting resolution and response are also considered “written” and are grievances that must be reported to the Department of Patient Services.
- The complaint is communicated verbally but cannot be [resolved](#) at the time of the complaint by [staff present](#); it requires additional time for investigation or action, or referral to other staff for sufficient resolution.

Post-encounter communications, verbal or telephone, regarding patient care that would routinely have been handled by [staff present](#) had the concern been communicated during a patient’s inpatient stay or clinic visit are encouraged, but not defined as a grievance.

- A patient or their representative specifically requests that a complaint be handled as a formal grievance or specifically requests a response from the hospital. This must be reported to the Department of Patient Services.
- A complaint about billing suggesting that UTMB did not follow CMS regulations regarding allowable charges for deductibles, coinsurance, blood, or non-covered and partially covered services; the handling of incorrect collections; and the limitations on charges that may be made to the beneficiary.

**Resolved:** A grievance is considered resolved when the actions taken by UTMB, in response to a [grievance](#), are to the satisfaction of the patient or their representative; or if, the investigation outcome is appropriate and reasonable, as determined by UTMB, even if the patient or their representative remains dissatisfied. Supporting documentation is maintained within the Department of Patient Services in accordance with UTMB’s records retention policy.

**Staff Present:** This includes any hospital staff present at the time of the complaint or who can quickly be at the patient's location to resolve the patient's complaint. This can include nursing, administration, patient advocates, etc.

**V. Dates Approved or Amended**

<i>Originated: 7/8/2016</i>	
<i>Reviewed with Changes</i>	<i>Reviewed without Changes</i>
05/02/2018	04/15/2022

**VI. Contact Information**

Department of Patient Services  
 409-772-4772  
[patient.services@utmb.edu](mailto:patient.services@utmb.edu)