

How Complaints Help Protect Patients and the Public

By Catharine Roner-Reiter, Supervising Staff Attorney

Complaints against health care providers play an important role in protecting the health and safety of Washington residents. Understanding how to file a complaint, and how complaints are received and reviewed by the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and the commission, helps protect patients, providers and the public.

Complaints may involve unlicensed practice, unprofessional conduct, a mental or physical condition that impairs a health care provider's ability to practice with reasonable skill and safety, or other violations of specific rules or statutes. While not all complaints result in disciplinary action, filing a complaint is an important way to help protect the health and safety of Washington residents and maintain the standards of health care professions in Washington.

Complaints may come to the commission for many reasons and from many sources, including patients, other providers, insurance companies, law enforcement agencies and state or federal agencies. Complaints may be filed by mail, by telephone or electronically. Complainants may identify themselves or choose to remain anonymous. However, if a complaint is filed anonymously, the complainant will not receive follow-up from the department about the status of the complaint. Complaints may also come through referrals from other agencies, including law enforcement.

When the department receives a complaint, it first determines whether the department has jurisdiction. If the complaint involves a person or entity licensed by the department, it is referred to the appropriate profession or program. Complaints that fall under the commission's jurisdiction are then sent to the commission to determine whether to open an investigation or close the case.

For more information about how to file a complaint with DOH and how the complaint process works, please visit:

[File a Complaint | Washington State Department of Health](#)

[Health Professions Complaint Process | Washington State Department of Health](#)