Most businesses operating in the service sector pride themselves on the speed of their responses. With time, people who buy those services come to expect a rapid response as normal and may be disappointed when their level of expectation is not met. Dentistry is perceived as a service by most patients and by default the dental team is expected to be efficient.

Consider the instance when a dentist has amended a patient’s course of treatment on several occasions. Not only were more items of treatment required, the choice of materials was also altered. On leaving the practice, the patient always stopped at the reception desk to book the next appointment and was given a new bill on each visit. By the fourth visit, the patient was sufficiently confused that he refused to pay the bill and wrote a letter of complaint instead. The dentist countered this by not replying. Rather than following the protocol outlined in the practice complaints procedure, he sent a final demand to the patient, four weeks later.

Grounds for complaint?
The patient complained to the local PCT, who in turn wrote to the practitioner, asking him to deal with the matter by following his own in-house complaints procedure. The dentist in turn consulted Dental Protection. A letter was drafted, whereby the dentist explained that he regretted the lack of communication during the treatment. He apologised and explained the reasons behind the changes in treatment and the consequent revision of the costs.

The patient was reassured that the practitioner was reviewing the practice systems and offered an apology for the delay. This approach worked, as the outstanding amount was forwarded by return. In addition, a short letter was drafted to the PCT confirming that the member would in future respond promptly to any complaints, should they ever arise.

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