

## CUSTOMER SERVICE POLICY AND STANDARDS

### Summary

This policy document describes the principles, standards and practice of customer service that The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust expects staff to provide for all customers.

### CONTENTS

Section	Page
1 Introduction	1
2 Definitions and scope	1
3 Standards of customer service	2
4 Publication of opening hours, response times and quality of customer service	4
5 Fielding queries	4
6 Cover for colleagues	5
7 Customer service training	5
8 Consultation, feedback and suggestions	5
9 Confidentiality	5
10 Monitoring performance against standards for timeliness and quality of customer service	5
11 Responsibility for monitoring the functioning of this policy	6
12 Accreditation	6
13 References	6
14 Linked documents	6

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Royal Marsden aims to offer a service that is efficient, effective, excellent, equitable and empowering with the patient and their family, friends and carers always at the heart of service provision.
- 1.2 This is reflected in The Royal Marsden's Equality Statement: *The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust believes in providing equity in its services, in treating people fairly with respect and dignity and in valuing diversity both as a provider of cancer and community health services and as an employer.*

### 2. Definitions and scope

- 2.1 The Royal Marsden regards all those involved in healthcare, including patients and their families, carers and friends, other service users and service providers, as its customers.
- 2.2 Research has indicated that there are a number of areas of customer service that are a priority for people. In particular, delivery, timeliness, information, professionalism and staff attitude are deemed important. Aspects of these key areas include a prompt initial contact with the customer and the ability to keep to agreed timescales; provision of accurate and detailed information with regular development updates, keeping promises and dealing with problems and issues in a professional and timely manner. These key areas have been found to be universal

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across most industries and are relevant within healthcare for patients and their families, friends and carers.

- 2.3 For the purpose of this policy, *customer(s)* refers to patients, their families, carers and friends, other service users and providers.
- 2.4 Staff must work together in accordance with this policy to provide the required service level for customers.
- 2.5 The standards described in this document are minimum standards for the Trust. Private Care have additional requirements.

### 3. Standards of Customer Service

Throughout all contact with customers, staff should aim to meet their needs through professional, courteous and efficient service. Staff will:

- treat all customers with respect and courtesy;
- listen to what customers have to say;
- personalise service to the needs and circumstances of each customer where practical;
- always do what they say they are going to do, or update the appropriate people promptly if things change, offering an explanation for the change;
- respond to enquiries promptly and efficiently;
- consult customers about their service needs.

Customers should be advised how long a service will take to achieve the expected outcomes. If a delay occurs the customer will be advised and staff will take action to overcome any possible delays.

#### 3.1 Telephone, answer machine and voice mail

- 3.1.1 Each department will publicise the hours it will answer telephone calls, for example through posters, booklets/leaflets or on the website.
- 3.1.2 When answering a telephone call staff should greet the caller and identify themselves giving their name and department. Staff will remain polite at all times and assist the caller where possible. When answering the telephone in person staff will aim to answer the telephone within three rings if they are available to take the call. As a standard, 90% of all calls answered by staff are to be answered within three rings. If staff are able to answer an unattended ringing telephone they will do so and leave a message for the person concerned. When taking a message from a caller, staff will note the date and time of the call, the caller's name and contact number and the details of the message. Who the message is for must also be clearly indicated.
- 3.1.3 If staff are not able to answer a caller's query immediately, they will take contact details and provide a response within two working days where the query is not of a complex nature. If more than two days is required the caller should be kept informed of progress with their enquiry. In the case of enquiries for a named person not expected to be available within the following two days, then the customer should be advised of the expected timeframe and offered a suitable alternative contact where possible.

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- 3.1.4 Use of telephone answering machines and voicemail to receive calls should only be used when necessary. Staff must ensure the answering machine and/or voice mail greeting is kept up to date, e.g. advising callers as to when their message will be retrieved and giving details for an alternative contact instead if the call is about an emergency. Staff will respond to messages left on answering machines and voicemail soon after retrieving the message and no longer than a working day later if the message is from a patient. If unavailable all day, where possible, an arrangement with colleagues should be made to either take calls or to retrieve any messages at least twice daily. Where possible, messages left out of hours will be responded to on the morning of the next working day. All voicemail users are expected to adhere to the voicemail operational policy. All greeting messages for clinical areas must contain The Royal Marsden Macmillan Hotline number.
- 3.1.5 When attempting to contact a patient by telephone, staff must preserve the patient's confidentiality according to The Royal Marsden's Data Protection Policy. When speaking to the patient or the patient's representative, who has been identified to staff previously by the patient, staff making outgoing calls will identify themselves, where they work and clearly outline the purpose of the call each time. Staff must follow the guidance in The Royal Marsden's Transfer of Personal Information Policy about leaving answerphone or voicemail messages for patients.
- 3.1.6 Staff have a responsibility to ensure their contact details are included and kept up to date in the intranet contact directory.

### 3.2 Typing – clinical correspondence

As a minimum, all letters will be transcribed, signed and posted out within six working days. In rare circumstances, an extension in response time may be agreed in discussion with the patient.

Contact names and telephone numbers for the department or person sending the communication should be provided in all correspondence.

### 3.3 Typing – non-clinical correspondence

Unless otherwise specified in other policies, for example the policies for complaints, Patient Advice and Liaison Service and freedom of information, a reply to correspondence relating to non-clinical matters should be sent out within five days of receipt of the original correspondence. If this is not possible an acknowledgment should be sent explaining the delay.

Contact names and telephone numbers should be provided in all correspondence.

### 3.4 E-mail

All staff are expected to adhere to The Royal Marsden's *Transfer of Personal Information Policy*.

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All e-mails sent to The Royal Marsden's website about non-clinical matters and to the Patient Centre e-mail address will be responded to within two working days. If a response is going to take longer than two working days to provide, the enquirer will be informed of progress and a realistic time scale set for resolution.

All e-mails sent to the Freedom of Information e-mail address will be acknowledged within two working days with a final response sent within 20 working days (see the *Freedom of Information Policy and Procedure*).

### 3.5 Website

The Royal Marsden will aim to make The Royal Marsden's [website](#) available 24 hours a day all year round with a downtime of no more than 1% each year.

### 3.6 Face-to-face meetings

Where staff meet face to face with customers, including at reception desks and restaurant/café service bars they will greet customers immediately as they present themselves or if the staff member is already engaged with a customer as soon as they are free. Staff should deal with the enquiry/transaction quickly and in a professional, courteous and helpful manner.

Receptions will be manned at all times during the normal working period for the area.

Staff required to visit a customer away from The Royal Marsden premises must make an appointment first. Staff will clearly identify themselves and the purpose of the visit at the start of the appointment. Whenever working away from The Royal Marsden staff must follow the *Lone Worker Policy*.

## 4. Publication of opening hours, response times and quality of customer service

- 4.1 Each service should publicise how users can contact the service, its opening times and its standards for timeliness and its quality of customer service for example on the website or in the service's literature.

## 5. Fielding queries

- 5.1 If a staff member is unable to answer an enquiry every effort should be made to transfer the enquirer to the person best able to help them. If a person on the telephone or through e-mail is being transferred to a different department or colleague the caller/e-mailer should be given the relevant direct dial number or e-mail address for future use. A caller should then be transferred through the telephone system while the e-mail request should be forwarded through the e-mail system.
- 5.2 Information about customers should be shared promptly with colleagues and partners whenever appropriate to reduce unnecessary contact and to avoid asking the customer the same questions repeatedly. The Royal Marsden's Data Protection Policy must be followed whenever information is shared.

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## 6. Cover for colleagues

- 6.1 To maintain service within patient/public-facing teams where there is a limited number of staff with the same role and knowledge, individuals should avoid being on lunch breaks and annual leave at the same time.
- 6.2 Staff are expected to provide cover within their own department. Staff may be expected to work in other departments during times of staff shortage or increased workload to ensure that The Royal Marsden provides a continuous service to its customers.

## 7. Customer service training

- 7.1 The Learning and Development Team run a number of courses about communication skills which staff are strongly advised to attend.

## 8. Consultation, feedback and suggestions

- 8.1 Where appropriate, individual Royal Marsden departments and teams should conduct regular surveys of the needs and perceptions of customers using their services. Guidance on constructing surveys can be found in The Royal Marsden's Clinical Audit Policy. Advice can be provided by the Patient and Public Involvement & Engagement Lead and Quality Assurance Team. The feedback should be shared with the local department or team and used to enhance services.
- 8.2 Customers should be kept updated about The Royal Marsden's strategies, service development plans and outcomes of consultations, using all appropriate communication channels. The Royal Marsden's Marketing and Communications Team is able to advise about ways to communicate with customers.
- 8.3 The Royal Marsden considers feedback received through complaints vital in monitoring and improving the quality of its services. Complaints will be managed in accordance with The Royal Marsden's Concerns and Complaints Policy and Procedure. How service users can make a complaint or comment on services should be widely publicised including in patient areas for example by leaflet or poster.

## 9. Confidentiality

- 9.1 All information gathered or held about customers will be held in accordance with The Royal Marsden's Data Protection Policy.

## 10. Monitoring performance against standards for timeliness and quality of customer service

- 10.1 Each service should monitor its performance against the standards in this policy and any other local targets. These performance results are to be publicised for example in the Integrated Governance Monitoring Report. Services should compare their customer service performance against other similar organisations to encourage learning and possible improvement. Local managers are responsible for identifying methods to monitor performance and to organise remedial actions, if necessary, to reflect the dynamic, responsive and learning nature of The Royal Marsden.

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## 11. Responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy

- 11.1 The Patient Experience Steering Group or a successor committee is responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of this policy. Regular reports of performance against the standards set in this document will be invited by the steering group from selected service areas on a rolling basis.
- 11.2 The Patient Experience Steering Group or a successor committee will receive regular reports of audits carried out to test adherence to the standards in this policy, including the *telephone and face-to-face contact between staff and customers* and *e-mail response* audits which are run by the Quality Assurance Team.

## 12. Accreditation

- 12.1 The Royal Marsden is accredited against the Government's Customer Service Excellence standard.

## 13. References

- 13.1 Customer Service Excellence standard (2008), Cabinet Office (Central Office of Information)

## 14. Linked documents

[Clinical Audit Policy](#)

[Lone Worker Policy](#)

[Concerns and Complaints Policy and Procedure](#)

[Data Protection Policy \(including DPIA\)](#)

[Freedom of Information Policy and Procedure](#)

[Patient Advice and Liaison Service Policy and Procedure](#)

[Transfer of Personal Information Policy](#)

[Voice Mail Operational Policy for the Use of](#)

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