



Zero Tolerance Policy

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<i>Author</i>	Stuart Gregory, Complaints Manager
<i>Lead department</i>	Regulatory

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1. Purpose

Portman Dental Care will not tolerate any form of abuse, violence, harassment or bullying in whatever form it takes, for whatever reason.

Our aim is to ensure that everyone who works or provides services at Portman Dental Care and our patients are protected from possible harm from violent, aggressive or bullying behaviour. It also helps to fulfil the practice's obligations to provide a safe place to work.

Our colleagues have a right to care for others without fear of being attacked or abused. This includes any physical violence towards any member of the team or other patients, such as pushing or shoving.

All our colleagues aim to be polite, helpful, and sensitive to all patients' individual needs and circumstances. Our colleagues understand that patients may not always act in a reasonable manner and will take this into consideration when trying to deal with a misunderstanding or complaint.

This includes all abusive, violent or harassment incidents, including:

- Patients and/or visitors on employees/Self-Employed colleagues
- Patients and/or visitors on other patients and/or visitors

2. Scope

This policy applies to all employees of Portman Dental Care and its subsidiaries. This policy also applies to self-employed clinicians engaged with Portman Dental Care. This policy applies to all regions where the business operates.

Colleagues and Patients can be affected if this policy is not followed correctly.



3. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of all Portman Dental Care colleagues to adhere to this policy and report all incidents in accordance with this policy

The company will endeavour to provide support, assistance and, if necessary, counselling to employees of the practice who are victims of abuse, violence or aggression in the course of their work.

Clinicians should be directed towards support such as the Dentist Health Support Trust (DHST)

All colleagues should:

- Familiarise themselves with this policy
- Be responsible for their own security and the security of others who may be affected by their acts and omissions.
- Co-operate with senior team members on security matters and observe all safety rules at all times.
- Promptly report all incidents, whether or not damage was caused.

- **Reception Team**
 - Make the Practice Manager aware of all zero-tolerance incidents as they happen.

- **Practice Manager**
 - To log any incidents onto RADAR.
 - Investigate the incident and obtain statements from colleagues where appropriate, with the assistance of your Operations manager or the People team where necessary.
 - To draft and send warning and final letter to patient and/or visitor where applicable.
 - To make sure that RADAR is kept up to date when a workflow step has been completed.
 - Advising colleagues of internal support measures, such as the Employee Assist Program (EAP) or the Dentist Health Support Trust (DHST)
 - Shared responsibility with Operations Manager, to facilitate a telephone call to the patient when in receipt of a zero tolerance warning letter, to set expectations if needed.

- **Self Employed Clinicians**
 - Make the Practice Manager aware of all zero-tolerance incidents as they happen.
 - To support the Practice Manager during an investigation into a possible breach of this policy from a visitor or patient.
- **Regional Clinical Leads**
 - Support Clinicians when an incident is raised.
 - Advising clinicians where necessary of the Dentist Health Support Trust (DHST)
 - Support investigation if appropriate where necessary.
- **Operations Managers**
 - Support Practice Managers, colleagues and Clinicians when an incident is raised.
 - Support investigation where necessary.
 - Advising colleagues of internal support measures, such as the Employee Assist Program (EAP) where necessary or the Dentist Health Support Trust (DHST)
 - Shared responsibility with Practice Manager, to facilitate a telephone call to the patient when in receipt of a zero-tolerance warning letter, to set expectations if needed.
- **Complaints Team**
 - To respond to any patient complaints received as a result of this policy being implemented.
- **Dento-legal Advisor**
 - To support the Complaints team and practices as necessary in responding to any patient complaints received as a result of this policy being implemented.
 - Respond directly to any patient where the complaint has been escalated
 - Support Practice Managers, colleagues and Clinicians when an incident is raised.
 - To advise on whether incidents need to be reported to an external body, for example the GDC, NHSE or the police, and to support with this where appropriate.

4. Zero Tolerance

Aggressive behaviour, be it violent or abusive, will not be tolerated and may result in the patient being asked to leave the premises.

The list below identifies types of abuse we will not tolerate. This list is not exhaustive and, in some instances, behaviours included will not result in direct removal from the practice.

Practices should record all incidents on the patient notes and practices need to be understanding of patients who may find themselves in a difficult situation.

This policy covers behaviours within the practice premises and all other premises where work is undertaken as part of the person's official duties, including when travelling to and from the workplace.

4.1 Reasons that would fall under this policy, leading to a warning letter being issued

This would typically include incidents where there is no harm or injury to person or property, and might include:

- Non-serious threats of physical assaults on colleagues or anyone else within the practice
- Psychological abuse of colleagues.
- Verbal abuse which includes shouting, swearing and gestures.
- Threatening or intimidating tactics used against colleagues, including: invasion of personal space, for example, pointing fingers in colleague's faces, attempting to assert physical dominance or making threats of violence.
- Unreasonable constant criticism.
- Persistent or unrealistic demands that cause stress to colleagues. (e.g., wanting an immediate appointment and becoming aggressive when this is not possible) Requests will be met wherever possible and explanations given when they cannot.
- Constantly requesting a different clinician.
- Inappropriately contacting a clinician outside the practice.

4.2 Reasons that would fall under this policy, leading to immediate removal from the practice list

This would typically include incidents which have led to harm or injury to any individual, or damage to the practice premises or property. It would also include more serious examples of the incidents in the above category.

- Physical assaults on colleagues or anyone else within the practice
- Abuse related to any protected characteristic.
- Sexual harassment, characterized by the making of unwelcome and inappropriate sexual remarks or physical advances in a workplace or other professional or social situation.
- Causing damage/stealing from the Practice's premises, colleagues or patients.
- Obtaining drugs and/or medical services fraudulently.

4.3 Reasons that would not normally lead to removal

- Patients who have made complaints about, or expressed dissatisfaction with the care they have received.
- Patients who have requested to transfer to another clinician.

5. Recognising the signs of an impending incident and how to defuse

5.1 Signs of an impending incident

The use of appropriate inter-personal skills in potentially difficult situations is essential.

Observation of the patient can help in predicting when aggression may occur. The following are some of the signs to look for:

- Muscles tensed; jawline tensed.
- Facial expression.
- Person ready to move quickly.
- Pacing about, uncomfortable stance, alternate sitting/standing.
- Withdrawn on approach.
- Voice-change of pitch or tone, use of insults, obscenities or threats.
- Increase in rate of breathing.
- Tears (crying).
- Offensive weapon carried or visible.

It is important to be mindful of any patients that disclosed any cognitive disabilities that could impact the behaviours mentioned above.

5.2 Proactively defusing a recognised condition

Having recognised such signs and assessed the potential of violence occurring, colleagues may feel they are able to diffuse the situation by using some of the following behaviours. These should only be used where colleagues are confident in doing so:

- Adopt an empathic, understanding approach, and attempt to show some affinity with the other person's position – "I can see why you are upset about that".
- Avoid confrontation, do not argue but do not agree to reward their bad behaviour.
- Speak and stand calmly with an open posture, but always remain balanced and ready to move away.
- Do not move closer to the patient, even if they are speaking quietly.
- Buy time to think, to plan, to obtain assistance – if possible, ask the patient to have a seat "while I go to see what I can do to help you" – this buys time and allows you to think of your options.
- Speak clearly, and slowly.
- Even if the other person is very loud, do not raise your voice.
- Try to identify the source of concern, acknowledge this and offer to help if possible.

- Do not disagree where it is not necessary.
- Never make promises which cannot be kept.
- Never reward aggressive behaviour.
- Do not make threats in retaliation.
- Be alert and send for assistance where necessary.
- Be prepared to leave the situation if necessary to avoid injury.

5.3 If the incident escalates further

If the aggressor continues or becomes more verbally aggressive, then the following process should be followed:

- If they continue with their aggressive behaviour, the colleagues should be clear in telling them that they will not be dealt with until the aggressive behaviour has stopped.

“I am sorry (use aggressor’s name here if it is known), we do not deal with people who are being aggressive or abusive. I want to try to help you but must ask you to please *stop shouting/ *stop swearing/*stop being aggressive or I will not be able to deal with you.”

If the patient continues to exhibit the same behaviour despite the verbal warning, an example of how to respond could be either:

a) Via telephone

“I am sorry, as advised I am not going to be able to deal with your request or assist you at this time and therefore will be ending this call. I would ask that you put your concerns in writing and we will respond in writing”

b) In person

“I am sorry, as advised I am not going to be able to deal with your request or assist you at this time. I would ask that you leave the practice and put your concerns in writing and we will respond in writing.”

- Remain calm and clear and reminding the patient/visitor that the behaviour is unacceptable. Insist that you want to help, but cannot do so until they calm down.
- Avoid giving the patient what they have asked for just to end the situation, for example the clinician agreeing to see the patient just “to keep them quiet”, unless this is an appropriate resolution. This makes it more likely that the poor behaviour will be repeated in future, and sets a poor example to on-lookers.
- If the patient continues/does not desist, in the interests of safety, it is best to have another colleague come to you at the desk. Colleagues should **never isolate** themselves with a

potentially violent patient. The second colleague may ask other patients (in queue) to step back while the current patient is being dealt with.

- Your senior colleagues are there to support you. You should always feel comfortable to ask a more senior colleague to speak to the patient. If possible, move the patient to a side of the desk whilst being mindful about **not isolating any colleagues** or allowing the patient access to the receptionist/reception area.
- If the aggressor refuses to calm down or refuses to leave when requested to do so, the practice team should contact the police to assist with the removal of the patient.

5.4 Repeated Incidents

If there are repeated incidents from a particular patient, then the practice should write to the patient warning them that no other incidents will be tolerated, and the patient will be removed from the list if this happens again.

Note that it is important to carry out this action once it has been written down. If the patient continues with this behaviour, even after the written warning, then they should be removed from the list for the sake of practice colleagues and other patients.

6. Violent Patients

6.1 Dealing with a violent patient

Dealing with a violent patient requires a much more immediate response. It is good practice to test these procedures on a regular basis. As soon as a patient turns violent, then immediate action must be taken, as follows:

- Step back from the desk.
- If the patient is in the consulting room with a clinician, then the correct procedure (6.2) should be implemented.
- Contact the Police
- If there are other patients in the vicinity, then there is a duty to protect them. If possible, remove/instruct other patients in the vicinity to move to another part of the waiting area or another room away from the situation.

6.2 Dealing with a violent or aggressive patient in the treatment room

Dealing with a violent or aggressive patient if the patient is in the treatment room with a clinician requires an immediate response. As soon as a patient turns violent, then the correct procedure should be implemented and immediate action must be taken, as follows:

- If possible, the Clinician should proceed to the door of the consulting room and request assistance from another colleague/request additional security.
- Two colleagues must immediately respond to the clinic room to provide assistance
- Phone the police. Once violence occurs, it becomes a crime.
- If there are other patients in the vicinity, then there is a duty to protect them. If possible, remove other patients in the vicinity to another part of the waiting area or another room away from the situation.
- Following an incident of violence, the practice should hold a significant event meeting to decide if the patient should be removed from the list, this meeting should be done with your Operations Manager.
- If the patient is to be removed from the list, then the practice should now follow the procedure for the removal of patients.
- Following the incident, the main points should be recorded as an 'Incident' on RADAR
- All incidents of violent and aggressive behaviour should be reported to the Practice Manager for noting on RADAR.

Physical violence on colleagues does not require a warning letter to be sent to patients. In this instance patients will be automatically removed from the practice in the interest of colleagues and patient safety.

6.3 Colleague Support following a violent incident

- Colleagues directly involved in the incident should talk through the incident on a one-to one basis with the practice manager/ operations manager / people team
- Colleagues not involved in the incident should be briefed about the incident when applicable
- If the person affected is not employed by the practice, for example a quality lead, then inform their line manager immediately after the incident
- The policy should be reviewed in light of the incident to update it with any additional learning points/changes necessary
- If the patient is to be removed from the list, then the practice should now follow the procedure for the removal of patients.
- Colleagues should be provided information for the Employee Assist Program (EAP)
- Clinicians should be directed towards support such as the Dentist Health Support Trust (DHST)

6.4 Accepting a patient known to have breached this policy

If another clinician in practice is willing to see a patient known to have breached this policy, the first incident remains the patients first warning. A subsequent incidence will result in the removal of the patient.

However, where we decide to keep a patient on after such an incident, you must ensure that patient care is not prejudiced or hindered.

In some incidences we may wish to write to a patient when we know they have been removed from a previous practice as this is sometimes noted on their patient records. We may wish to advise them we are aware of this incident and inform them of our zero-tolerance policy. (Appendix 4)

7. Reporting

All incidents (however trivial) must be reported at once to the Practice Manager or Operations Manager and details must be recorded. In the event of any actual or threatened violence, or other criminal behaviour, the police may be called.

Injuries should be recorded in the accident book and all incidents logged on the RADAR system. This will then be picked up by the Quality Lead and the NHS Delivery Manager (if an NHS patient is involved) for further reporting if required.

Every incident of violence or aggression should be recorded in the patient's notes and additionally this should be reported onto RADAR.

Possible information that may be required for the NHS area team includes:

- Patient ID (e.g., NHS number or PMS number)
- Date of Birth
- Time and date of incident
- Nature of incident – particularly the trigger point (e.g., not able to get appointment)
- Perspective of Colleagues member dealing with the incident
- Names and statement of any witnesses
- Record of any actions taken

8. Patient Expectations

Patients and visitors are expected to:

- Treat practice employees and other patients and visitors with respect.
- Behave in a way that is appropriate and will not lead to violence or abusive incidents.
- Be treated with respect.

9. Patient Removal

If patients are to be removed in line with this policy, NHS Practices must first contact the NHS Delivery Manager of any breach of this policy. They then must inform their local NHS areas teams when they send a Zero Tolerance letter to a patient. Patients cannot be removed from NHS lists without the permission of the NHS area team. Letters should not be sent to the patient from the practice without approval from the NHS Delivery Manager, the local NHS area team, and the practice's Operations Manager.

If a practice feels they need to remove a patient from a private patient list they must speak to the clinician treating the patient, have information of the incidents and discuss with relevant stakeholders before contacting the patient. Operation Managers, Clinician/s and Practice Managers need to be involved for consultation prior to removing private patients.

All incidents must be investigated and statements obtained by the colleagues involved before we contact the patient regarding any incidents. This must be filed on RADAR under the reported Incident.

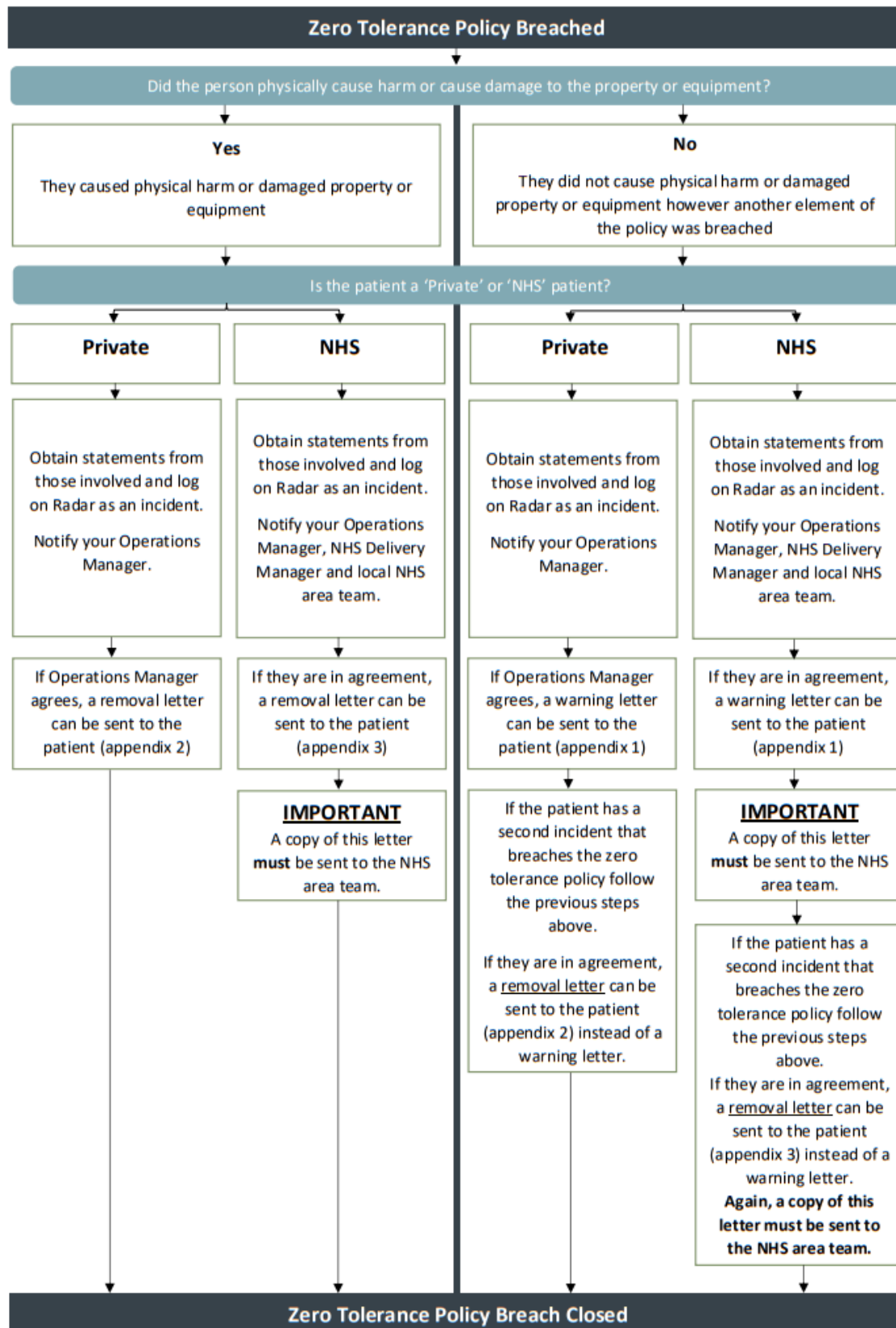
If a patient has breached this policy, but not used physical violence, you should issue them with a 'first warning' letter' (appendix 1), this is to inform them that their behaviour will not be tolerated in the practice should it happen again. Should the private patient have a second incident at the practice you can then issue them with a second letter (appendix 2 or 3) explaining the first incident and warning and then the second incident and removal from the dental practice. Second letters to patients should not be sent without approval from all of the relevant patient type approvers.

We must be very clear to all patients when communication to allow them to understand the decisions we are making. This may require a follow up call from the Practice Manager or Operations Manager, to set the patients expectations.

Incident	Action
Private Patient has had a first instance of Zero Tolerance Behaviour (Swearing/Abusive Call)	Incident to be discussed with Operations manager and patient to receive first warning letter from the practice
Private Patient has second incident at the practice that falls into Zero Tolerance Behaviour	Incident to be discussed with Operations manager and patient to receive removal letter from the practice and patient list due to their behaviour
Private Patient is physically aggressive to patient/colleague or damages equipment/practice due to aggression. This is a serious incident and should not have a first warning	Incident to be discussed with Operations manager and patient to receive letter advising they are being removed from the practice due to breach of the Zero-Tolerance policy

<p>NHS Patient has had a first instance of Zero Tolerance Behaviour (Swearing/Abusive Call)</p>	<p>Incident to be discussed with Operations Manager and NHS Delivery Manager & local NHS area team and patient to receive first warning letter from the practice (Copy of letter to be sent to area team)</p>
<p>NHS Patient has second incident at the practice that falls into Zero Tolerance Behaviour</p>	<p>Incident to be discussed with Operations Manager and NHS Delivery Manager & local NHS area team and patient to receive removal letter from the practice and patient list due to their behaviour (Copy of letter to be sent to area team)</p>
<p>NHS Patient is physically aggressive to patient/colleague or damages equipment/practice due to aggression. This is a serious incident and should not have a first warning</p>	<p>Incident to be discussed with Operations Manager and NHS Delivery Manager & local NHS area team and patient to receive letter advising they are being removed from the practice due to breach of the Zero-Tolerance policy (Copy of letter to be sent to area team)</p>

10. Policy Flow Chart



11. Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 (Warning Letter) – Suggested Wording

Dear [Patient Name]

I am writing to you following your visit to our practice on [Date].

During this visit, *(details of incident – remain factual)*

We are writing to tell you that we deem this behaviour to be unacceptable and in breach of our zero-tolerance policy.

It is my responsibility to point out to you that there is a zero-tolerance policy, in this practice and across the Portman Dental Care group, for patients who display inappropriate behaviour.

We take this policy very seriously, and would not hesitate to remove patients from the list who do not abide by this policy. There will always be instances where we are not able to meet a patient's expectations and we understand that this can be frustrating to our patients. However, it is important that our practice team are treated with the same level of respect that they show to our patients, both over the telephone or in practice.

We completely understand and are empathetic to how stressful these situations surrounding your dental care can be and, as advised, we will always attempt to find a suitable resolution for our patients as quickly as possible. On this occasion we are happy for you to remain with the practice, but insist that you abide by the above-mentioned policy in all your dealings with the practice moving forward.

We hope you understand that should you behave in such a manner again we will have no alternative other than to exercise our right to remove you from our List.

Yours Sincerely,

[Practice Manager Name]
Practice Manager

11.2 Appendix 2 (Removal Letter Private) – Suggested Wording

Dear [Patient Name]

Following our previous letter to you dated [insert date] regarding a breach of our zero-tolerance policy by yourself, you have subsequently breached this policy for a second time.

(Details of incident – remain factual)

It is therefore regrettable that we must inform you that we are removing you from the practice list, and any future appointments you have booked with us will be cancelled. We do not take action like this lightly, but have unfortunately been left with no alternative.

We would recommend that you seek alternative dental care as soon as possible, in order for you to continue your routine care.

Yours Sincerely,

[Practice Manager Name]
Practice Manager

11.3 Appendix 3 (Removal Letter NHS) – Suggested Wording

Dear [Patient Name]

Following our previous letter to you dated [insert date] regarding a breach of our zero-tolerance policy by yourself, you have subsequently breached this policy for a second time.

(Details of incident – remain factual)

It is therefore regrettable that we must inform you that we have contacted our NHS area team and will be removing you from the practice list, and any future appointments you have booked with us will be cancelled. We do not take action like this lightly, but have unfortunately been left with no alternative.

We would recommend that you seek alternative dental care as soon as possible, in order for you to continue your routine care. You can do this by visiting <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

Yours Sincerely,

[Practice Manager Name]

Practice Manager

11.4 Appendix 4 (Accepting a Known Violent Patient) – Suggested Wording

Dear [Patient Name]

Thank you for registering with Dr [Clinicians Name]

We are now in receipt of your full medical records.

We note, from these records, that you were removed from your previous practice due to a breach of their zero-tolerance policy.

It is my responsibility to point out to you that we have a zero-tolerance policy across our group for patients who are abusive and/or violent to colleagues. At [Practice Name] we take this policy very seriously, and we must notify you that we would not hesitate to remove patients from the practice list, who do not abide by this policy.

We are happy for you to remain with the practice, but insist that you abide by the above-mentioned policy in all your dealings with our colleagues.

If you wish to discuss this matter further, then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely

[Practice Manager Name]
Practice Manager