POLICY:

The grievance process promotes patient empowerment in healthcare. This policy defines the process for customer complaints and grievances in accordance with State and Federal regulations so a prompt and fair resolution is reached.

Front line staff is encouraged and trained to listen and address the issue at the time concerns are voiced. If resolution of the issue is not possible at the time, timely and appropriate review of response is our goal.

A Complaint is defined as displeasure with a process or person. A Grievance is defined as an issue that is related to a real or perceived violation of a patient's rights or alleged or actual adverse outcome resulting from care provided at United General or a United General provider. A Suggestion is intended to improve quality at United General.

Notification of Patient Rights
Patient Rights posters and patient education materials are provided in admission material and in patient care areas throughout the organization.

1. Prompt Resolution of Patient Complaint/Grievance
   All internal and external customer (patient, physician, staff or visitors) complaints and process problems will be addressed at the time of the occurrence in an effort to resolve the customer complaint and/or review and improve the process. All patient and/or family complaints received should be responded to within 45 days.
   - An issue is not a grievance if it can be handled on the spot by staff present.
   - An issue is not a grievance if patient currently in hospital calls leadership first and had not yet tried to resolve the issue with the involved department. Leadership can forward the complaint to the proper department and consider it a complaint.
   - If the issue is able to be resolved while the patient is still an inpatient it is not considered a grievance.
   - Billing issues are not considered grievances unless the patient is disputing charges due to poor care or service.
   - If the first awareness of an issue comes in writing after the patient leaves the hospital and it does not meet any of the documented grievance criteria it is considered a patient complaint.

2. Who to Inform of Complaint or Grievance
   Complaints may be handled by front line staff or operational leadership. Grievance responses will be coordinated through Administration. Methods of Complaint Communication - Concerns may be expressed verbally to staff, via comment card, satisfaction survey narrative, phone call or letter. Staff are to communicate concerns that may result in a grievance to the CCO or CEO.

3. Leadership and Operating Board Role
   The United Operating Board has delegated to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) the responsibility of coordinating this process. The CEO is responsible for aggregating data and submitting it to the United Operating Board periodically. The Board uses this information to assess the effectiveness of the resolution. CEO and Senior Leadership are responsible for reviewing the information for improvement opportunities.
4. Every effort should be taken to investigate and communicate with the complainant within 45 days. If the review is likely to take more than 7 days, a letter or phone call of acknowledgement is recommended. This letter should include who is responsible for the review and a phone number to contact them if desired.

5. In all grievance resolutions, the hospital must provide the patient with written notice of its decision that contains the name of the hospital contact person, the steps taken on behalf of the patient to investigate the grievance, the results of the grievance process, and the date of completion.

6. If the grievance is not resolved, the patient will be referred to the Patient Rights form printed at all registrations which lists the Department of Health Quality Assurance contact: (360) 236-4700 and The Joint Commission Office of Quality Monitoring contact: (800) 994-6610.

7. Any alleged breach of verbal or written patient identifiable information to a party or parties who does not have a right to that information is a violation of hospital policy. The Privacy Officer will be notified for investigation and action.