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**Your Self Help Guide to Resolving NHS Concerns**

The National Health Service (NHS)

Most people using the National health service are happy with their treatment, however sometimes things can and do go wrong.

If you are unhappy with the service received from a hospital, doctor, dentist, local surgery, or any other NHS service, you have the right to raise your concerns about it.

By raising your concerns as soon as possible, it can help put things right quickly and the NHS can also learn from your experience and n turn make improvements if necessary.

The outcome of raising your concern could include an explanation or an apology and you could gain information about how the NHS has used your experience to improve services or care going forward.

**Using the Self Help Guide**

This pack aims to help you feel confident about raising your concerns for yourself, in turn Empowering you, your voice and views in relation to your own Healthcare.

Before embarking on raising your concern or complaint it may be useful to read through and follow the step-by-step guide below.

**Firstly, What you are unhappy about?**

It’s important to be clear what specifically has made you unhappy in this situation, For example:

• Treatment or care

• Staff attitude

• Poor communication

• Waiting times

• Lack of information

• Failure to diagnose.

**2. Think about the outcome you want to achieve?**

This could be for instance:

\* An Apology

\* An explanation of what happened

\* Changes or training of staff to prevent the issue reoccurring

**3.Is there a time limit for making a complaint**?

Yes, Complaints should be made withing 12 months of the incident happening, or within 12 months of you realising that you have something to complain about (for instance you may have been too unwell to complain immediately) the NHS will then consider if it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly.

Throughout the process of complaining you should expect:

• To be treated with respect and courtesy

• To be offered support to help you raise your concerns (this could be via your local Advocacy service\*)

• A speedy solution to be offered where possible.

• An explanation of what happened.

Once you are clear about what you are unhappy about you need to decide how best to raise your concerns; there are different ways to do this, and it helps to think about what you are comfortable with.

**4. Who shall I raise my concern with?**

There are several options here:

a). You could speak to a member of staff directly - Many complaints are caused by misunderstandings or communication issues that may be put right once the problem is explained, so if If you feel able to , this may be the quickest way to resolve an issue ,

You can also speak to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) within the hospital If you feel uncomfortable contacting the NHS staff directly, officers from PALS are available in all hospitals. PALS provide information, advice and support to patients, families and their carers and can help get answers to your questions quickly; you can find your nearest PALS office using the directory on the PALS website. [What is PALS (Patient Advice and Liaison Service)? - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/hospitals/what-is-pals-patient-advice-and-liaison-service/)

b) Local Resolution The NHS Complaints Procedure

The NHS complaints procedure focuses on resolving your complaint locally. The NHS complaints procedure may be the best route to follow if:

• You have raised your concerns but they have not been resolved fully

• What happened raises serious questions about standards of care

• You wish to raise complex issues which require investigation

• The issues involved concern more that one organisation The aim of Local Resolution is to try to sort out your problem directly with the NHS organisation in question;

The NHS aims to respond to you efficiently, sensitively and promptly.

Local Resolution is your opportunity to explain what it is you are unhappy about and what you would like to happen, it gives you, and the NHS organisation, time to listen and discuss the incident. Local Resolution is important because it aims to resolve your concerns and, where appropriate, use your experiences to improve local services. At this stage it is important to raise everything that you are unhappy about as new issues cannot later be introduced as part of the same complaint. It may be helpful to keep a record of any telephone calls you make and letters you write or receive about your complaint. If you send a written complaint letter, keep a copy of the letter to refer to later If your complaint concerns more than one NHS organization, you only need to send a letter to one of the organisations; they will liaise with the other organisation(s) involved and provide a coordinated response

**5.How do I complain?**

• In person

• On the telephone

• email

• In a letter NHS organisations tend to prefer having complaints in writing but, if you would rather telephone or go in person, the Complaints Manager should make a written record of your complaint and give a copy to you. Helpful tip: All NHS organisations have complaints procedures and in most cases they will probably be best placed to deal with your complaint however, for complaints about primary care and independent providers such as your GP, dentist, optician, pharmacist, health centre or other independent NHS contractor, you have two options:

a) You can complain directly to the NHS organisation by contacting the person in charge of complaints; in most GP and dental practices, this will be the Practice Manager.

Or b) If you don’t feel comfortable about raising the matter with your GP or Practice Manager, you can complain to either the NHS Commissioning Board or your local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG). All CCGs will have a Complaints Manager who can advise you about making a complaint. If you want to complain about your hospital or ambulance service, contact the Complaints Manager or the Chief Executive of the NHS Trust. Helpful tip: What will happen next? Sometimes it may be possible to resolve your concerns immediately but if this is not the case they:

• Should acknowledge your complaint either verbally or in writing within 3 working days

• Must offer to contact you to discuss your complaint and arrange a plan to resolve your concerns with you; this means they will discuss how best to resolve your concerns and what you hope to achieve from raising them.

They should also agree a timescale with you for resolving the issues and how they will keep you informed of progress. The suggested timescales can be influenced by things like how many staff they need to speak to, how easy it is for them to access your medical records and if other NHS organisations are involved in your complaint. If there is a problem in keeping to the agreed timescale they should contact you before it expires to agree an amended timescale. Resolving your complaint The NHS organisation should offer assistance to enable you to understand the complaints procedure or advice on where to obtain such assistance.

You may be offered a meeting to discuss your complaint and speak to staff directly about what has happened; you can take a friend, relative and/or advocate with you to any meetings you may have. Sometimes the NHS uses Conciliation or Mediation services. A conciliator/ mediator is a neutral and independent person who can arrange a meeting with you and those involved (either separately or together) so you can all express your views and try to resolve your differences. A conciliator will become involved only if everyone affected agrees; the conciliation process is confidential Conciliation and Mediation Services differ from Trust to Trust so if this is offered you should ask the Complaints Manager to explain how it operates in their area. Useful tip: It may be helpful to prepare a list of questions you want to ask at your meeting and bring this with you; try to keep these questions clear and concise. It is also helpful to take any relevant paperwork with you to the meeting. After the investigation Once the investigation is finished and any meetings have been held the Complaints Manager should send you a letter containing:

• A summary of your complaint

• What the investigation found and any actions to be taken as a result

• What to do if you are still unhappy with the answers given. Depending on the investigation the letter may contain:

• An apology, if relevant

• What actions will be taken and when, as a result of your complaint

• Who is responsible for making this happen

• What steps have been taken to prevent the same thing happening to other people

• Balanced, factual and impartial

• Clear and easy to understand.

**A sample template is attached below:**

* Please note: The brackets and information within these are to assist as a guide and should be removed before adding your own information.

More information is available on the NHs Website , this can be found on the following link [How to complain to the NHS - NHS (www.nhs.uk)](https://www.nhs.uk/contact-us/how-to-complain-to-the-nhs/)

(Add Your address here )

**PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL**  
   
(Add the date of the letter here )

(Add the Name of complaint officer, hospital or practice manager if known)  
( Add their address here)

   
Dear……  
   
REF: (Add the patient’s name, date of birth, address here )

   
I am writing to raise a concern/complain ( remove which is not relevant) about the treatment of (the patients name)by (name(s) of staff (if known) at (the place where the incident happened])on (the date of the incident).  
   
(Add a brief description of what happened here )

(Add the details of why you are not satisfied here, be as clear and brief as possible and if you want to raise concerns or complaints about a number of matters, list the most important ones first).  
   
( list specific questions that you want answers here to as part of this complaint of concern here, most important first, Remember if you do not ask the questions, your unlikely to get the answers you seek. )

( explain here the details of what you would like to happen as a result of your letter of example an apology, or an explanation, or the assurance that staff have retraining or this will not happen again) .  
   
Could you please carry out a full investigation into my concerns above and provide a response in accordance with the NHS Complaints Process.  
   
I look forward to hearing from you.  
   
Yours sincerely  
   
( Sign and print your name here)

**6. What if I’m not happy with the response(Local resolution) I received ?**

If you are not satisfied with the reply ask yourself exactly what you are still unhappy with so you can decide what to do next, it may help to review:

• The letter

•Any meetings

• Whether parts of your complaint have yet to be answered

• Whether you feel evidence you gave was not properly considered

• Whether you have achieved the outcome you wanted

• What more, if anything, could have been done to achieve the outcome

You could write another letter explaining what you think has not been covered. You could call the person handling your complaint and explain why you are still unhappy You could request a meeting to discuss your outstanding concerns You may choose to try a different route to achieve the outcome you want .

You have the right to take your complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman if you are not satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the NHS.

The Ombudsman is independent of the NHS and of government and their services are free and confidential. They can be reached via their website <https://www.ombudsman.org.uk> Or helpline on 0345 015 4033. You should submit a complaint no later than one year from the date of the events you are complaining about (or from when you first became aware of the matter), although the Ombudsman can extend this time limit, for example, if the Local Resolution process took longer than a year. The Ombudsman will look at every complaint that comes to them but they do not (and are not required to) investigate all the complaints referred to them; this is a matter for their discretion. They will not normally investigate your case unless you have already tried to resolve the problem using Local Resolution.

The Ombudsman can refer you back to the Local Resolution stage of the NHS Complaints Procedure if they think you have come to the Ombudsman too soon, or if they feel that the NHS organisation involved has not done all it can to resolve your issues locally. The Ombudsman will not usually investigate a complaint where:

• You do not agree with a decision made by your NHS provider but cannot offer any evidence as to why their decision is wrong or unsatisfactory They decide that there is no evidence to suggest that the NHS provider acted wrongly

• They decide that the NHS provider or practitioner has done all they reasonably could do to put things right •

They decide there would not be a worthwhile outcome from an investigation (for example, if the remedy sought by the complainant is not possible through this procedure) The Ombudsman’s decision about your complaint is final. This includes their decision whether or not to investigate your complaint and their decision whether or not to uphold your complaint, following an investigation Initially, a member of the Ombudsman’s staff will consider whether your case meets the Ombudsman’s criteria for investigation. To carry out this assessment they may need to see clinical records and other papers involved in your complaint with this in mind a member of the Ombudsman’s staff will contact you to ask for any papers they need and will write to you to let you know the outcome of the assessment. If you take your complaint to the Ombudsman, there are 3 main outcomes:

1. The Ombudsman may decide not to investigate the case and take no further action (for example, if they think that the NHS has done all it can to resolve your complaint locally).

2. The Ombudsman may decide not to investigate the case but may ask the NHS provider or practitioner to take action which they think would resolve your complaint more quickly without the need for an Ombudsman investigation; this is called an ‘intervention’.

3. The Ombudsman may decide to carry out an in-depth investigation resulting in a detailed report about the case; this investigation will be very thorough and can therefore take some time. The Ombudsman aims to complete If your complaint is investigated by the Ombudsman The ombudsman will write a detailed report about the case. If the complaint is upheld, they can make recommendations to the NHS provider or practitioner to put things right

**7. I think I may need some help to complain.**

The NHS Complaints Advocacy Service: \*Matrix, Advocacy in Slough [www.matrixsdt.com](http://www.matrixsdt.com/) Telephone: 01753 415299provide a free, independent, and confidential service to assist you in raising concerns about NHS care or treatment. Your advocate will:

* Listen to your concerns.
* Discuss the support you need.
* Offer information on the complaint process.
* Help define your desired outcomes (e.g., apology, explanation, service improvements).

Understanding Your Options: Financial compensation for clinical negligence typically requires legal action. Disciplinary action against NHS staff is handled separately. Private healthcare complaints have their own procedures, as do care homes.

Your Advocate Will:

* Provide a confidential platform to discuss concerns.
* Guide you through the complaints process.
* Assist in writing effective letters.
* Support you in meetings.
* Contact relevant parties upon your request.
* Always respect your decisions