

## **Fact Sheet**

# **Writing a complaint letter**

### **Who do I complain to?**

#### **Complaints involving NHS organisations**

##### **a. Hospital or ambulance service**

If you want to make a complaint about a hospital or an ambulance service, contact:

- The Complaints Manager or
- The Chief Executive of the NHS Trust

If you are not clear where to send your complaint, ask for advice from:

- The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) or
- The Complaints Department at the hospital or
- Your local Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service

Alternatively, most hospital Trusts have details of how to contact them about complaints on their **website**.

If your complaint concerns more than one NHS organisation you only need to send a letter to one of the organisations. They will liaise with the other organisation(s) involved and provide a co-ordinated response.

##### **b. Primary care (i.e. GP, dentist) or independent provider**

For complaints about service provision in primary care or by independent providers such as your GP, dentist, optician, pharmacist, health centre or other independent NHS contractor, you have two options:

Your options:

1. You can complain directly to the NHS organisation and service by contacting the **person in charge of complaints**. In most GP and dental practices, this will be the Practice Manager.
2. 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 CCG's will have a **Complaints Manager** who can advise you about making a complaint.

**NOTE:** if you choose to make a complaint directly to the organisation (option a), and you are not satisfied with their response you cannot then raise the same issue with the Commissioner of the service but must go directly to the Health Service Ombudsman.

## **Complaints involving non NHS organisations**

There are separate complaints procedures for social care complaints or complaints about privately arranged services.

Although the Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service cannot support complaints in these cases, we will point you in the right direction of where to get help.

The Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service can support you in complaining about NHS services that include a **social care element**. An example of this might be you wanting to make a complaint to the hospital about your discharge but part of the complaint relates to social care services provided when you arrived home.

If your complaint involves a service that is provided in partnership with the NHS, you only need to complain to one of those services.

## Writing and sending the complaint letter

The letter should clearly outline your complaint and should ask for it to be investigated under the **NHS Complaints Procedure**. If you are writing on behalf of someone else who is a patient, rather than for yourself, you must show that you have the **patient's permission**.

### Helpful tips:

#### Be brief

- Try to keep your complaint to no more than two pages
- Be careful not to lose your main points in a long letter
- If the complaint is long and complex attach a **log sheet** or **diary of events** with details

#### Be clear and straightforward

- Use short sentences
- Don't be afraid to say what has upset you, but avoid aggressive or accusing language
- Don't repeat yourself

#### Be constructive

- Your complaint is an opportunity to improve things
- Put your concerns politely, but firmly
- Explain what you would like to achieve as a result of your complaint for example an apology, an explanation, a service improvement, any other remedy

#### Keep copies

- Keep a copy of all letters or emails sent and received, in date order and a note of all telephone calls made

#### Send photocopies of documents, not originals

- Keep the original documents in your possession

#### Make sure your letter is received

- You may wish to send it by guarantee or recorded delivery

## What happens next?

You should receive a letter of acknowledgement within **three working days**.

The NHS should contact you to:

- **Discuss your complaint** and arrange a plan to **resolve your concerns** with you. This means that they will discuss how best to resolve your concerns and what you hope to achieve from raising them
- Agree with you a **timescale** for resolving the issues and 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 this timescale they should contact you before it expires to agree an amended timescale

If your complaint involves a service that is provided in **partnership with the NHS**, the organisation that received your complaint will approach the other organisations.

Between themselves the organisations will agree who will:

- Take the **lead** in handling the complaint
- Be your **point of contact** and take responsibility for communicating with you
- **Co-ordinate** the handling of the complaint and any investigations
- Ensure you receive a **single response**, addressing all issues agreed at the outset

If you need more advice on writing a letter of complaint, or at any point during the complaint process, please contact Healthwatch Shropshire's Independent Health Complaints Service.

**Healthwatch Shropshire**

Phone: 01743 342181

Email: [enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk)

## **Example framework for a first letter of complaint**

**PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL**

Insert your address  
and telephone number

**The Chief Executive or Complaints Manager (name if known)**

Followed the by the name and address of their organisation

Date

Dear.....

**Re: NHS Complaint - Complainant name, Date of Birth**

I am writing to complain about the treatment I received from [name(s) of staff] at [place where incident happened/treatment received] on [date of incident/period of treatment].

*OR [if you are acting on behalf of the patient]*

I am writing on behalf of [insert name of patient], and I enclose their written agreement to act on their behalf.

*[If the patient is unable to give consent for example, if they are too young, ill or deceased, then you should explain this].*

Describe:

- What happened,
- When, and
- Where

If you were unable to recall events because you were undergoing surgery (for instance) include information provide by third parties and how they were made aware of this.

If you have a log sheet or list of events, you can attach this as a separate sheet and refer to this here. Explain what, if anything, you have already done to resolve matters.

I would like the following points addressed in the response to this complaint.

- Put the most important matters first
- Explain why you are not satisfied
- Be clear and brief
- Number or bullet your points
- Ask the questions you would like the answers to and list them in order of importance

As a result of this complaint I would now like.....

Say what you want to achieve, for example:

- An explanation of what happened
- An apology
- Action to remedy the problem you experienced, by a named person

I look forward to receiving your acknowledgement of this letter. I would like you to carry out a full investigation into my concerns and provide a response in accordance with the NHS Complaints Procedure.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need further information. Thank you for your attention to this complaint. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

*Your signature*

Print your name

If you are sending copies of your letter to other people, show this here.

cc. other people

**Sample complaint letter**

**PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL**

Mrs A Jones  
1 The Avenue  
Your town  
AB1 2CD  
Tel: 01234 567891

Mr C Clarke  
The Complaints Manager  
The River Medical Centre  
10 The Street  
Any town  
AT4 8BQ

Date

Dear Mr Clarke,

**Re: NHS Complaint - Mrs A Jones, DOB 1 January 1970**

I am writing to complain about the way I have been treated by Dr Smith at The River Medical Centre.

I was seen by Dr Smith three times, on 24 April, 31 May and 10 December 2015. He did not examine me or do any tests. I feel that he did not take my symptoms seriously and said my problem was due to stress and that I should take things easy.

I was feeling so unwell and found this dismissive attitude upsetting. I was worried so I made an appointment to see another doctor in the practice. I do not know his name but it will be in my notes.

This doctor examined me on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2016 and arranged for tests. These showed that I was diabetic. I was prescribed medication and a special diet and I

am now feeling much better. During the period from April 2015 to January 2016, however, I suffered with several infections, sleepless nights and I was very depressed.

I have tried to raise my concerns with Dr Smith but he would not listen.

I would like the following points addressed in response to this complaint:

- Is my medical condition poorer as a result of my diabetes not be detected and diagnosed by Dr Smith on previous appointments?
- Why did Dr Smith not order any tests?

Along with answers to my questions, I would now like:

- Dr Smith's attitude to patients to be reviewed
- Dr Smith to explain why he did not listen to me or examine me
- An apology from him for the unnecessary stress and poor health I suffered because of his inadequate care
- To know what arrangements the practice has for reviewing the listening skills of doctors

I have had very good care from the practice in the past, in particular from Dr Bright until he retired. I was then moved to Dr Smith. I would like to regain confidence in the care provided by the practice.

I would appreciate it if you would carry out a full investigation into my concerns, and provide a response in accordance with the NHS Complaints Procedure.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs A Jones