



NHS  
Complaints  
Advocacy



Making a **complaint**  
about the  
**National Health Service (NHS)**



Easy Read  
Easy Words and Pictures



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# Introduction

You get healthcare from the National Health Service (NHS). The staff work hard to help you stay healthy, or to get healthy if you are not well.



Some health services you might have used:

- Hospital
- Local doctor
- Dentist
- Optician (who looks after your eyes)
- Care home



The people in the National Health Service always try to give you the best service.

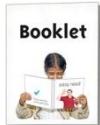


But sometimes things go wrong. You might not be happy with the care and treatment you get from them. You can complain about this if you want to.



By telling people what you are unhappy with, they can help make things right. And they can help make their services better for people who might use them in the future.

## How to use this booklet



The information in this booklet will help you make a complaint about your healthcare if you want to.



It will also help you understand how NHS complaints advocacy can help you.



# How can NHS Complaints Advocacy help you?

NHS Complaints Advocacy can help you make a complaint about care you have received from the National Health Service.

## NHS Complaints Advocacy is:



- Free.
- Independent. This means that we are separate from the National Health Service and do not have to do what its staff say.
- Confidential. We will not tell anyone about you unless you say we can.



You can contact an Advocate by telephone, email or through our website. You can also write to them.

## The Advocate will:



- Listen to what you have to say.
- Talk to you about the support you need to make your complaint.
- Talk to you about what you want to get out of the complaint. This might be for the service to say sorry to you. Or it might be for them to do things differently in the future.





- Give you information about different ways you can complain to the National Health Service.
- Support you to decide how you want to complain.



This booklet can help you make a complaint by yourself. There is more useful information on our website:

**[www.nhscomplaintsadvocacy.org](http://www.nhscomplaintsadvocacy.org)**



### **If you decide that you want support from an Advocate to make a complaint, they can:**



- Help you write a letter of complaint.
- Support you to get ready for any meetings that you have about the complaint.
- Go to those meetings with you if you want them to.
- Speak to different people in the NHS about your complaint if you need them to.
- Talk to you about the answers you get from the NHS. They can then help you decide if you are happy with these answers.



Your Advocate will not try to tell you what to do. It is always your choice and we will help you do what you choose.



# **How to make a complaint**

## **Step 1**

### **What do you want to complain about?**

**You can complain about any part of your healthcare. Here are some examples of what you might be unhappy with:**



- The way that NHS staff have treated you.
- The way that NHS staff have talked to you.
- You feel that nobody talked to you about your healthcare. Or did not support you to understand what was happening.



- You had to wait a long time to be seen by someone.



- You were ill and nobody could tell you what was wrong with you.



***Useful tip: Write down what you are unhappy about. You can look at this later to check if you are still unhappy.***

***You can get someone to write things down for you if you do not feel able to do this.***

## Step 2

### What do you want to happen?



If you tell someone what you want to happen as a result of your complaint, they will be more likely to make it happen.

#### If you make a complaint, you will:



Sorry!



- Get a polite service from the person dealing with your complaint.
- Get support to make your complaint.
- Get a quick answer if there is one.
- Get an apology if the service agrees that it has done something wrong.
- Help people get a better service in the future.

#### What an Advocate CAN NOT help you with



You can only get an NHS Complaints Advocate if your complaint is about the NHS. Some healthcare is given by private organisations. If you are not sure if the NHS does your healthcare, you can ask your healthcare service. They should be able to tell you.



An advocate cannot help you get money if your treatment has made your health get worse instead of better. You would need to speak to a solicitor if you wanted this to happen.



You cannot ask for someone who works for the NHS to be fired.



## Step 3

### Who do you make a complaint to?

First you need to know:

- What you want to complain about.
- What you want to happen to your complaint.

Then you need to tell someone what you are unhappy about.

**You can:**



- Speak to a member of staff directly. It is possible that the healthcare service does not know that you are unhappy. If you tell them, they might be able to help you straight away.
- Speak to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). These are members of staff who work for the NHS. Their job is to help give the right information to you. They also talk to people in the NHS to solve your problem.



If you have tried the things above but are still not happy, you can make a complaint. If you do not want to try these things, you can also make a complaint.



# What is the NHS Complaints Procedure?

## Complaining to your local service

### When you need to complain



You should complain as soon as you can if you are unhappy about something.



If you can, you should do this within 1 year of deciding you are unhappy.

If you have been too ill to complain within 1 year, you can still talk to the NHS service. They might decide that they can still look at your complaint.



### Who you should complain to

If you decide to make a complaint, you have to contact your local service. You will usually speak to the Complaints Manager.



If you want to complain about an ambulance service, you can complain to the Hospital's Complaints Manager.



If you want to complain about a doctor or dentist, you can complain to the person who runs the surgery. They are usually called the Practice Manager.



You need to tell the Complaints Manager everything you are not happy with.

If you are not sure who to complain to, you can ask a member of NHS staff. You can also talk to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who will be able to tell you.



Or you can call the NHS Complaints Advocacy Service at VoiceAbility and we can help you find out the right person to speak to.



***The same problem might involve lots of NHS services. If this is the case, you only need to complain to one of the services.***

***They will talk to other services that you are unhappy with. They will answer for all the different services.***



When you contact the Complaints Manager, keep a record of everything you say to them, and everything they say to you. To help you do this, a Log Sheet is included in our self help pack. You can fill in all the details, or you can get someone else to fill them in for you.



### **You need to write down:**

- Who you wrote or spoke to.
- What they said they would do for you.
- When they said that they would do things by.



## You can explain what happened to you:

- In person.
- On the telephone.
- By email.
- In a letter.

If you speak to the Complaints Manager on the telephone, they should write down your complaint. They should send you a copy of what they have written down.

### COPY

Dear Sir or Madam,

Thank you for your letter.  
We are pleased to say that we  
are happy to do the things  
you asked us about. We will  
phone you to talk some  
more about this.

Best wishes,

D. James

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Best wishes,  
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**Useful tip: if you send the Complaints Manager a letter, you should keep a copy of your letter.**



**If you need support with any of these procedures, a free, independent NHS Complaints Advocate will be able to help you.**



## What happens next?

Hopefully you will get an answer quickly from the NHS service that you are happy with.



### If this doesn't happen, the NHS Complaints Manager should:

- Write to you or telephone you within 3 working days to say they have received your complaint. Working days are Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.
- Look at your complaint. If they can solve the problem straight away, they will write to you and tell you what they are going to do.
- If they cannot solve the problem straight away, they will contact you and tell you. They will tell you if they need to get more information. This might be information you can give them. Or it might be information that they need to get from other people. They should tell you what they are going to do and when they are going to do it.

The Complaints Manager can give you information to help you make a complaint. They might give you information so you can contact an NHS Complaints Advocate.





## Investigating your complaint:

If the Complaints Manager needs to find out more about your complaint, they will start an 'investigation'. This means they will talk to different people to find out information. They might have meetings about your complaint.



If they ask you to come to a meeting to talk about your complaint, you can take someone with you. This might be a friend or someone in your family. You might want to take an Advocate with you.



There may be lots of different people in the meeting. It is useful to take someone with you in case there is anything you do not understand.



***Useful tip: If you are asked to go to a meeting, you might want to write down the questions you want to ask before you go. This will make it easier to say all the things you want to say.***



***You should also take any information that you have about your complaint.***



***An NHS Complaints Advocate can support you to prepare for the meeting and go to it with you.***

## After the investigation:



Once the investigation is finished, and any meetings have taken place, the Complaints Manager should send you a letter.

The letter **should** have:

- A short reminder of your complaint.
- What the investigation found.
- Answers to your complaint.
- Information about what you can do if you are still unhappy with their answers.



The letter **might** have:

- An **apology**, if the service thinks they have done something wrong.
- Information about **what** the service is going to do to make things right.
- Information about **when** the service is going to do this.
- Details of **who** is going to do these things.



If you have not received a letter by the date agreed with the Complaints Manager, you can ask them where it is.



The letter may be sent to you by email, if you have agreed to this.



## What if I am not happy with the answers I get?

You need to ask yourself what you are not happy with. You might feel that the Complaints Manager has not done a very good investigation. Or you might feel that only some parts of your complaint have been answered.



There are some things you can do:

- You could write another letter explaining why you are still unhappy.
- You could call the Complaints Manager and tell them why you are still unhappy.
- You could ask for a meeting to talk about the complaint.



The Complaints Manager might need to do another investigation. They should let you know how long this is going to take.



Or the Complaints Manager might think that they have done everything they can do. If this is what they think, they will write to you and tell you that.



# The Health Service Ombudsman



If you are not happy with the answer you have been given by the NHS Complaints Manager, you can go to the Health Service Ombudsman.



The Health Service Ombudsman is an organisation which is separate from the NHS. It is there to make sure that all NHS services run in the right way. They investigate complaints about the NHS.



You cannot go to the Ombudsman until you have already made a complaint to the NHS service that you are not happy with.



If you need to go to the Ombudsman, you have to go onto its website. Its website address is:

**[www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)**

On the website they have a form which you will need to fill in.



If the Ombudsman thinks that it can help you, it will let you know what it is going to do. If it does not think that it can help you, its staff will write to you and let you know.



If the Ombudsman needs extra information its staff will contact you. They might ask you for your medical records or information about the complaint.

**If you take your complaint to the Ombudsman, there are 3 main outcomes that are possible:**



1. The Ombudsman might decide that it cannot help you. It might decide that the NHS has done everything it can to solve the problem.



2. The Ombudsman might decide not to investigate the case. But it might ask the NHS service to do some things to help solve the problem quickly.



3. The Ombudsman might decide to investigate your complaint. This might take some time because they will look at a lot of information.

## If the Ombudsman decides to investigate your complaint



The Ombudsman will write a report about your complaint. It will have lots of information in it.



The Ombudsman might decide that you were right to complain. If it does, its staff will tell the NHS service what it needs to do to make things right.

## The Ombudsman's decision



The Ombudsman's decision about your complaint is final.

This means that if it says that it cannot do anything to help you, you will have to stop your complaint.

And if it says that you were right, the NHS has to do what the Ombudsman says to make things better.

### ***Useful tip:***

***Fill in the Ombudsman's form and get all the information about your complaint together at the same time.***



***Our NHS Complaints Advocates can help you with this if you want them to.***

# Questions and Answers



## Who can complain?



Any NHS patient can complain about a NHS service they have received and are not happy with.



Someone can complain for you if you want them to. But you have to give them permission in writing.

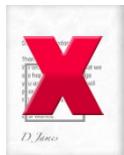
## My dad died and I want to make a complaint. But now I can't get his permission. Is that ok?



Yes. You can complain about the treatment someone received if they have died. You don't need their written permission.



In some cases the NHS may decide that you are not the right person to complain. They will talk to you about this if this is the case.



## My daughter is a child and has Down's Syndrome. I can't get her permission to complain. Is that ok?



Yes. A complaint can be made for a child (under 18) if they can't make the complaint themselves.

NHS services must be sure that the child cannot complain themselves.



## Can I complain about something that happened a long time ago?

It depends on how long ago it happened. You should make your complaint

- Within 1 year of you becoming unhappy with the service.  
**Or**
- Within 1 year of you realising you had something to complain about.

NHS services might allow you to complain after 1 year if there is a good reason for this. You might, for example, have been too ill to complain at the time.



## Can I complain to the NHS about treatment in a private hospital or care home?



It depends. If the NHS paid for your care in a private hospital, you can complain to the NHS.



If you paid for your treatment yourself, or you had private medical insurance, you cannot complain to the NHS.

### How to complain



The private hospital will have its own complaints procedure that you should follow.



Helpline Number: 0300 330 5454



Textphone Number: 0786 002 2939



Fax Number: 0330 088 3762



NHS Complaints Advocacy  
VoiceAbility,  
Mount Pleasant House,  
Huntingdon Road,  
Cambridge, CB3 0RN



[nhscomplaints@voiceability.org](mailto:nhscomplaints@voiceability.org)

[www.nhscomplaintsadvocacy.org](http://www.nhscomplaintsadvocacy.org)



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