

Raising a concern or complaint about an NHS Service

FACTSHEET #2

The NHS works hard to provide a high-quality service but sometimes things go wrong. If you are unhappy with the service you, or someone you know has received from an NHS service you can raise your concerns. By raising a concern, the NHS can try to put things right and learn from your experiences.

NHS services can include hospitals, doctors, dentists, pharmacists, ambulances and opticians. These services can be delivered in hospitals, clinics, in the community or in prisons. They can also be delivered in private health establishments, where the NHS has paid for the treatment. This can also include NHS funded nursing or residential homes.

If you paid for your treatment yourself, or through private medical insurance, you cannot complain to the NHS. The service you used (e.g. private hospital or private dentist) will have its own complaints procedure that you should follow. Complaints about care homes and nursing home complaints cannot be made through the NHS complaints procedure unless it is paid for by the NHS. Care homes and nursing homes will have their own complaints procedure so you can still make a complaint.

You should consider taking professional advice if for example you are contemplating legal action.

There are different ways you can raise your concerns. You could:

- Speak to a member of staff directly - You can speak directly to a member of staff who is delivering the NHS service, or their manager, about what you are unhappy about.
- Speak to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) - PALS aim to ensure that the NHS listens to all patients, their relatives, carers and friends. They aim to answer your questions and resolve your concerns as quickly as possible. Note not all NHS Services have such teams.
- The NHS Complaints Procedure - This may be the best option if you have already raised your concerns but they have not yet been fully resolved. You may also want to make a complaint if you have serious concerns about standards of care or a complex issue which you consider requires formal investigation. See Factsheet #3 for more information

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Who can complain?

A complaint can be made by a person affected by the actions or decisions of an NHS organisation or primary care practitioner. A complaint can also be made on someone's behalf with their consent. You can still make a complaint if the person it relates to has died. Young people under 18 are entitled to complain independently. The NHS cannot consider a complaint made on behalf of a young person without their consent unless they are sure that the young person could not have complained themselves.

What is the time limit for making a complaint?

You should normally complain as soon as possible, within 12 months of the event or of becoming aware that you have something to complain about. NHS organisations can waive this time limit if there are good reasons why you could not complain.



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