

Writing a complaint letter



**Independent
Complaints
Advocacy**

If you have decided to make your complaint in writing, this guide may help you to put this together and plan the details you want to include.

Who can complain:

The NHS Complaints Regulations state that anyone can complain, either about the treatment they have received personally, but also about the care provided to a friend or family member. This is detailed as,

“a person who is affected, or is likely to be affected, by the action, omission or decision of the responsible body which is the subject of the complaint.”

Most organisations will seek consent from you to investigate the concerns raised, but also to consult the medical records, as these are confidential. This is usually a form sent out through the post for you to sign.

Be aware: An NHS body can request consent from the patient to investigate and release details to the complainant. This is because some of the information may be very personal and so is covered under the Data Protection Act. If it is not possible to provide this, the organisation may not be able to provide a complete response, but should still be able to investigate issues, and provide a letter which answers things generally, and does not provide any private or specific details about the patient. If you already have this consent, or the patient has died, it might be a good idea to include this in your original letter.

Who to complain to:

Complaints in writing should be ideally addressed to the person in charge of the organisation. This might be the Chief Executive Officer if it is a large Hospital or Mental Health Trust, or could be a Senior Partner or Practice Manager if you are unhappy with the care provided by a GP, Dentist, Optician or Pharmacist. You can also complain to a Ward Manager, Matron, or to the Complaints Department if you would prefer.

If you are not sure who to complain to, information can usually be found by telephoning the organisation or on the Trust website. You could also discuss this with an advocate who can explain your options clearly.

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Writing and sending the complaint letter

You might have already thought about the issues you want to include in your letter. The letter should clearly outline your complaint and should ask for it to be investigated under the NHS Complaints Procedure.

Below are some tips for putting your letter together;

- Make it clear who the complaint is about – use the full name of the patient, and make sure you insert their date of birth, so they can be easily identified.
- Try to keep your letter concise and to the point – sometimes issues can get lost in a long account which describes what happened in great detail.
- If your complaint spans many months or needs a lot of detail, perhaps use a time line, or diary of events to structure your letter, and list your questions and issues separately.
- Be factual and avoid aggressive language or comments which could be classed as offensive.
- Try to avoid repeating yourself - make your point and then move on to the next issue.
- You could group issues together by theme to organise your letter – eg. Medication, Cleanliness, Attitude, Discharge
- Ask definite questions and for the organisation to investigate specific issues or episodes.

Do not be afraid to say what has upset you, and explain what you would like to achieve as a result of your complaint. You can then use this as an opportunity to make suggestions for how they can improve services, request to make changes to organisational policies and processes as well as explanations or an apology.

You could also include a contact telephone number in the letter, so the NHS body can easily contact you if there is something that requires explanation or they wish to discuss your letter at all. It might also be an idea to detail in the letter if you would like to have a meeting to discuss your complaint before receiving a written response.

Before you send it:

Read the letter again to make sure that everything you want to say is included. Make sure you sign it at the end of the letter, otherwise this may cause a delay in the organisation starting their investigation. Keep a copy for you to refer to later – this will be useful for you to compare your response to. It might also help to keep a copy of all letters sent and received, in date order. You could use the log included in this guide to help with this. You may wish to send your letter by recorded delivery, so you can be sure that this has been received.

Complaints about more than one NHS body

If your complaint is regarding more than one NHS organisation, you can either send separate complaints to the different organisations, or if you wish you can send all your concerns in one letter.

If you decide to send one letter – Send your letter to one NHS organisation and ask them to co-operate to provide a co-ordinated response with the others involved. They should then communicate with the other bodies concerned with your complaint, investigate and provide a combined response. It is also a good idea to state that you give your permission or consent for your complaint to be shared with the other organisations and health professionals. If you prefer, you can send a copy of your letter to each NHS organisation involved asking them to speak to each other and provide a response together. If you are unsure if this option is for you, then speak to an advocate who will be able to provide you with more information so you can make your decision.

Complaint letter help guide

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

Insert your address

The person in charge/ Chief Executive Officer (name if known)

Followed by the name and address of their organisation

GP surgery Dental Surgery Hospital Trust or Primary Care Trust

Date

Dear....

RE: NHS Complaint – Complainant name, Date of Birth

I am writing to complain about the treatment I received at *[place where treatment was received]* on *[date of incident/period of treatment]*. If you are writing on behalf of the patient, add this in here, and explain the relationship between you and why they cannot complain.

Describe

What happened When Where

If you have kept a diary, a log sheet or list of events, you can use this to make the body of your letter or you can attach this as a separate sheet and refer to this here. Explain what, if anything, you have already done to try 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 happen, for example:

- an explanation of what happened
- a change in a process or policy
- an action to remedy the problem you experienced
- an apology

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.

Yours sincerely *(if you have named the Complaints Lead)*

Or, Yours faithfully *(if you have started the letter 'Dear Sir')*

Your signature

Print your name

If you are sending copies of your letter to other parties, show this here.
cc. Other party

Sample letter

1 The Avenue,
Anytown,
AT1 2AB
Tel: 01234 5678910

Jane Smith
The Complaints Manager
The Old Surgery
2 The Street
Anytown
AT1 2CD

.... Date2012

Dear Jane Smith

RE: NHS Complaint – Mrs A Smith, DOB 19 May 1963

I am writing to complain about the way I have been treated by Dr Jones at the Old Surgery. I was seen by Dr Jones three times, on 26th April, 31st May and 13th December. 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 his attitude upsetting as he did not seem to take me seriously. 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 8th January 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 2008 to January 2009, however, I suffered with several infections, sleepless nights and I was very distressed. I have tried to raise my concerns with Dr Jones but he would not listen.

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

1. Is my medical condition poorer as a result of my diabetes not being detected and diagnosed by Dr Jones on previous appointments?
2. Why did Dr Jones not order any tests?

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

- Dr Jones' attitude to patients to be reviewed
- Dr Jones 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 the doctors.

I have had very good care from the practice in the past, in particular from Dr Allen until he retired. I was then moved to Dr Jones. I would like to regain confidence in the care provided by the practice. I would like you to carry out a full investigation into my concerns in accordance with the NHS Complaints Regulations.

Yours sincerely

Mrs A Smith