

Independent Complaints Advocacy Service

Supporting patients and their carers wishing to pursue a complaint about their NHS treatment or care.



Making a Complaint

If you're considering making a complaint using the NHS Complaints Procedure, it's worth thinking things through carefully at outset. Start by following these simple steps and making some notes.

Remember that if you're looking for financial compensation for clinical negligence you will need to speak to a solicitor who specialises in medical or clinical negligence within three years of the incident.

Remember, too, that if you've paid for private treatment or used medical insurance you cannot use the NHS Complaints Procedure to make a complaint. The private healthcare service will have its own complaints procedure that you can follow. This also applies to privately-funded nursing homes, most of which will have their own arrangements for complaints.

The NHS Complaints Procedure will probably be the best route to follow if:

- you've raised your concerns but they haven't 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 than one organisation.

The NHS Complaints Procedure may not be the best route to follow if:

- staff have listened to your complaint and you've already been offered a range of options to resolve what went wrong
- staff have listened to your complaint and acted to put things right
- staff have shown that they've learned any lessons and reviewed their procedures and practice as a result of what happened to you.

1. What do you want to complain about?

It's important to be absolutely clear what you want to complain about. This can be any aspect of the NHS care and services that you have received, but might range from an ambulance taking over an hour to arrive to a GP refusing to do a home visit, or from the unacceptable attitude of an NHS employee to mistakes in administering medication.

2. What do you want to achieve?

Your complaint is more likely to be dealt with smoothly if you can be specific and realistic about your aims.

When raising a concern with the NHS you can expect:

- to be treated with respect and courtesy
- a speedy solution to be offered where possible
- an explanation of what happened
- an apology if appropriate
- changes to be made so that the same thing will not happen to anyone else.

3. Raising your concerns

Many complaints are caused by misunderstandings that can be put right once you explain the problem. If you feel able to, speak to a member of staff who is directly involved. This is often the quickest way to put things right and stop them getting worse.

4. Deciding whether to go ahead

- Think about whether you have a complaint to make
- Can you resolve the problem by speaking to a member of staff directly?
- Think about the pros and cons of making a complaint eg what are the downsides and who else might be affected and how?
- What information (eg copies of health records) do you need before you can decide whether to make a complaint?

5. Going ahead

Making a complaint can be complicated and lengthy (writing letters, remembering deadlines, keeping notes of phone calls etc.) so click here to find out what help is available in your area (link to interactive map)