

Part 2 – WHO AND HOW

This is the second in a series of fact sheets providing a summary of the NHS complaints procedure in England as of 2017 from the perspective of a bereaved parent. This page describes briefly the information you will need in order to be able to go ahead with a complaint, assuming that this is a decision you have now made. (Please see Part 1 for guidance on making that decision.)

This summary has been based on guidance produced by other organisations. You can find more detailed information at these links:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/nhs-and-social-care-complaints>

https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/20140210_6642_cqc_how_to_complain_leaflet_final_web.pdf

UNDERSTANDING THE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The basic process for making complaints to or about the NHS



WHO CAN HELP WITH MAKING A COMPLAINT

Here is a link that gives a full list of all the organisations that are available to help with making a formal complaint, or assist with making a direct approach on an informal basis:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/nhs-and-social-care-complaints/complaining-about-the-nhs/who-you-can-go-to-when-you-have-a-problem-with-the-nhs/organisations-that-can-help-you-make-a-complaint-about-health-services/>

WHO IS WHO

NHS provider: It is called the National Health Service (NHS) but it is made up of many different parts. For the purpose of these fact sheets, when we write about the NHS we are referring to GPs, dentists and hospitals, and any healthcare provider that receives NHS funding for their services.

NHS England, NHS commissioners and CCGs: NHS services are commissioned (paid for) by one of several bodies. Local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) usually handle complaints relating to primary care such as GPs, dentists and pharmacists. NHS England handles complaints relating to secondary care such as hospital care, mental health services, out of hours services.

Read more:

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/nhs-and-social-care-complaints/nhs-complaints-who-is-your-complaint-against/complaints-about-other-nhs-services/>

Healthwatch: Healthwatch is an independent organisation; it listens to the views and concerns raised by members of the public about health and social care services. It raises these concerns with the bodies that deliver and pay for these services. It does not investigate individual concerns or complaints, but can point people in the right direction.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS): PALS is a free and confidential advice service run by NHS employees for patients, their families and carers. This advice and information relates to concerns you may have about our NHS treatment or any other health related issue. Your local council or local hospital can give details of the local PALS.

Care Quality Commission (CQC): The CQC works independently of health and social care services in England. They check and regulate health and social care services to ensure they are providing safe, high quality and effective services. In monitoring and inspecting these services, they encourage them to change things where appropriate to ensure a high standard of care is achieved and maintained.

Parliamentary & Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO): This is a free and independent service. It can be a later step in the process of complaining about an NHS service.

GETTING STARTED

Preparation

- Collect all the information available to you relating to your complaint, for example: details of the issue you are concerned about, names of staff involved, relevant dates and events relating to these concerns.
- You may want to apply for access to your child's medical records. If these are GP records, their GP or practice manager can point you in the right direction. If they are hospital records, the best person to speak to would be the records manager. There are various legal issues with confidentiality that could be hurdles to getting this information, and if you are not successful at your first attempt, you may want to seek help from one of the organisations listed at the link on the previous page.
- You may also consider using notes from your child's inquest, if one took place. The coroner may be able to help with this.

Decide what outcomes you are looking for

- It is a NHS pledge under the NHS Constitution that when mistakes happen and if someone is harmed, they – or their family – should receive an appropriate explanation and apology, delivered with sensitivity and recognition of the trauma that has been experienced.
- You may be seeking a commitment that procedures will be improved so that other people do not have the same experience you had. This could mean, for example, that a healthcare professional gets more training or that new procedures are brought in.
- Remember that there is no guarantee that these outcomes will be achieved.

Keep track of communications

- It is important to keep copies of all communications, including emails and letters that you send and receive.
- Keep notes. These notes should cover points including: why you are complaining, and what you hope to achieve from it, for example; an apology, a change in treatment or an explanation.
- If you are sending relevant documents in the post, it is a good idea to send out copies and retain the originals.
- Make a note of any verbal communication and record dates when information was sent and received.

Prepare for any meetings

- If making a complaint verbally, it is sensible to make notes beforehand of what you would like to say, and then be prepared to make notes when speaking to the relevant staff members. You may want to run through what you plan to say with a friend before your actual meeting.

Take care of yourself!

- The complaints process can generate a mixture of feelings. It can be important to seek for support if we find ourselves struggling to manage during this process. Please see the TCF leaflet *Prolonged and Intense Grief* for more on this subject.

Read more: Tips and tools for making a complaint

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/health/nhs-and-social-care-complaints/complaining-about-the-nhs/tips-and-tools-to-help-you-make-a-complaint-about-health-services/>

What's next:

Please see Fact Sheet No. 3 in this series for details about the process and what you can expect.

The Compassionate Friends is a national charity supporting bereaved parents and their families. We publish a range of leaflets offering advice, guidance and support for bereaved parents and siblings. View the full range on our website: <https://www.tcf.org.uk/content/resources/>

Find out more about The Compassionate Friends: www.tcf.org.uk