

A guide to making an NHS Complaint.



**If you are unhappy
about any aspect of
NHS care or
treatment you or
others have received,
you can raise your
concerns about it.
This booklet will give
you all the
information to get
you started.**



Committed
to quality

Section 1. Raising an NHS concern or complaint

If you are unhappy about an NHS service you are entitled to raise your concerns. The NHS take all comments made about their services seriously, whether these are good or bad. However, you might feel like you just need some information or have a simple question which needs answering. In most NHS organisations there will be a Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS) who may be able to help with enquiries. Their role is to ensure that the NHS listens to patients, relatives, carers and friends, and answers their questions and resolves their concerns as quickly as possible. Get in touch with us and we can provide contact information for local PALS teams. Our contact details can be found on page 3.

You have the right to have your concern or complaint dealt with efficiently, for it to be investigated and to be informed of the outcome.

Raising your concern could resolve the issue, or provide you with an apology or explanation. It can also be beneficial to an NHS service as they can use your experience to improve treatment and care for others in the future.



- **An NHS complaint should be made within 12 months of the incident, or of it coming to your attention. Consent is needed in some cases to make a complaint on behalf of someone else.**
- **Complaints CANNOT be used to take disciplinary action against NHS staff**
- **Compensation claims for clinical negligence CANNOT be made through an NHS complaint.**
- **Complaints about privately funded treatment CANNOT be made through an NHS complaint**

If you are unsure if you have a complaint, you can contact Healthwatch Sefton to talk through your concerns and help you decide whether to raise a concern or complaint.

Who to raise a concern with

- If possible speak to an NHS staff member or manager directly about the issue you are unhappy about
- Some larger NHS organisations have a PALS (Patient Advice Liaison Service) office who can help patients, relatives and carers with any concerns and questions and resolve them as quickly as possible

How to make an NHS complaint

For complaints about GP surgery staff, dentists, pharmacies, you can contact the service directly by writing to a manager. Details of a service's complaints process should be available on their website or by contacting them directly. Some NHS services also have a PALS and complaints team you can contact if you wish to make a complaint. (Contact our Signposting and Information service for contact details).

Section 2. How the Healthwatch Sefton Independent NHS Complaints Advocacy service can help you!

This pack has been designed to take you through the process step by step, guiding you through each stage of the complaints process. If you feel you require the support of an advocate, and you live in Sefton, Healthwatch Sefton's complaints advocacy service can provide this. Our advocate can help with:

- **A free, confidential and independent service so you can discuss your complaint**
- **Explore options available at different stages of the process**
- **Writing letters and communicating with complaints teams**
- **Helping you prepare for, and attending meetings with you**
- **Support can be accessed by telephone, email, online meetings or face to face**



An advocate cannot advise or influence your decision in any way. They will provide information about possible options and the process of NHS complaints.

What Healthwatch Independent Complaints Advocacy cannot support you with:

- Compensation for clinical negligence
- Disciplinary action against an NHS staff member
- Complaints about privately funded treatment
- Complaints about organisations which are not NHS funded



If you have already submitted your complaint, we can still support you through the next steps of the complaints process.

How to contact us.

You can contact us by telephone on **0800 206 1304**, or via email info@healthwatchsefton.co.uk

Our postal address is below (if you use the Freepost address below you do not need to use a stamp)

FREEPOST RTCG-HGXH-LHRS

Healthwatch Sefton

Sefton CVS

3rd Floor, Suite 3B, North Wing

Burlington House

Crosby Road North

L22 0LG

Section 3. How to make an NHS Complaint.

- Take some time to think about what you are unhappy about
- Think about whether it's an enquiry or complaint you have
- Check your complaint within the time limit
- What outcome you would like: an explanation, apology or changes to procedures
- If your complaint has numerous issues, you may find it useful to use the space below to separate each issue



Your complaint can be made:

- Face to face/ in person
- On the telephone
- By email
- Using an online complaints form if available
- Writing a letter

If you make your complaint verbally, a record of your complaint will be made and you'll be provided with a written copy. To do this contact the NHS service you want to make a complaint about and ask to speak to someone because you would like to make a complaint.



If you complain in writing always keep a copy.

Complaints can be sent directly to the NHS service manager, for GP surgeries for example, this would usually be to the Practice Manager.

OR

You can also complain directly to NHS Cheshire and Merseyside – the integrated care board (ICB) for the region, which is responsible for planning NHS services for our population, which includes the care you receive at your GP practice, local pharmacy, NHS dentist, NHS opticians, or at hospital.

You can get in touch by contacting their patient experience team using one of the ways below:

Website: <https://www.cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk/contact/complaints/>

Telephone: 0800 132 996

Email: enquiries@cheshireandmerseyside.nhs.uk

You can also write to:

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside
No 1 Lakeside,
920 Centre Park,
Warrington
WA1 1QY



You cannot complain directly to the NHS body and then raise the issue again with NHS Cheshire and Merseyside.

Section 4. What should I include in the complaint letter?

The following is a guide to what information you should include if you decide to put your complaint in writing:

- Patient's name, address, and contact number
- Patient's NHS number (if known)
- Patient's date of birth
- Dates and timescales of what happened
- Name of NHS provider (for example the hospital name) where the incident happened
- Names of staff involved in the incident
- What happened?
- What questions you would like answers to
- What outcome you are hoping for from the complaint
- Representative's address (if applicable) For example if you get in touch with us for support our contact information can be included.



Try to be specific, brief and keep to the point of the complaint

If your complaint is about more than one organisation you only need to send one letter to one of the organisations. They will liaise with the other organisations involved and provide one coordinated response.



QUICK TIP!

It might be helpful to keep a record of any telephone calls you make and keep copies of any letters you write or receive regarding your complaint.

Section 5. An example of a complaint letter

Complaints Department
Name of NHS organisation
Address of organisation

Your Name
Your address
Your telephone Number
Your email address

Date

Dear Complaints Manager or name if known,

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 and where in a paragraph or bullet points. 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 like – **Say what you want to happen, for example: an explanation of what happened and why it happened (from their point of view)**

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

I look forward to your acknowledgment of receiving my complaint, and a full response in the appropriate timeframe. 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.

Use

Yours sincerely (if you have named the person the letter is addressed to)

Or

Yours faithfully (if you don't include a name and have started the letter for example 'To the Complaints Manager' / To Whom it May Concern)

Sign and Print your name

Cc: If you are sending copies of your letter to other parties, print their names here [Don't forget to include Healthwatch Sefton if we're helping you with your complaint]

Section 6. What happens after I've made a complaint?

You should expect an acknowledgement and the offer of a discussion about the handling of your complaint within 3 working days of receiving your complaint.

The acknowledgment should tell you how long it should take for you to receive a full written response to your complaint. If you do not hear by the deadline you should contact the complaints team to ask for an updated deadline.

The NHS service will investigate your concern(s), and that will include speak with staff members concerned, look at medical records.

The response should answer fully the questions or points you raised in your complaint. It should state any action if needed, has been taken.

If you do not agree with the response, or questions remain unanswered you can ask for a resolution meeting, sharing details of the points you feel have not been resolved and the outcomes you are looking for.

Local Resolution meetings

- You may be offered a meeting with NHS staff to discuss your complaint and resolve any outstanding issues.
- You can ask if a record of this meeting will be made in writing or audio recorded.
- Most complaints teams will ask for the points you wish to discuss before the meeting
- NHS staff will attend and usually someone from the complaints team. You can ask someone to attend with you, this may be a complaints advocate if you prefer.
- Try to be clear and concise and give NHS staff the chance to answer to respond.

Written response to your complaint

Once your complaint has been investigated you will receive a final response.

If you reach the end of the organisation's complaint process and are not happy with its final decision, you can complain to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO). The PHSO independently investigate complaints about UK government departments, other public organisations and the NHS in England. Their service is free, fair and open to everyone.



You **MUST** complete the local complaints process before contacting the PHSO. The service is **FREE** and independent of the NHS.

You should do this as soon as possible. You have **one year** from when you first knew about the problem to bring your complaint to the PHSO.

How to make contact with the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)

Website: www.ombudsman.org.uk

Telephone: 0345 015 4033

The helpline is currently open Monday to Thursday from 9am to 4pm and Friday from 8.30am to 12pm.
They are not open on bank holidays.

Contact us to gain further information and support.

Get in touch with us to find out more about our independent complaints advocacy service and how we can help you.

Give us a call on 0800 206 1304 or email us: info@healthwatchsefton.co.uk

