

# How to make a complaint about NHS services

## Our approach

We gain valuable information from complaints which helps us improve services. Our main aim is to do whatever we can to resolve your complaint to your satisfaction. We hope this information will help.

## What we have in place

All NHS trusts have a Complaints Manager who has overall responsibility for handling and considering complaints.

When we receive your complaint a letter of acknowledgement will be sent to you within three working days. You can contact the Complaints Department on 020 8725 1609 or by emailing [complaints.compliments@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints.compliments@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

## What happens now?

The Trust will investigate the issues which you have raised and review the outcome of that investigation. The aim will be to resolve matters.

If we feel that urgent action is needed based on what you have said in your letter, then this will be taken without delay.

## Your future care

Your care and the way our staff communicate with you should never be affected because you have made a complaint. Please let us know

if you feel this has happened so we can conduct a separate investigation.

### **When will I receive a response?**

It is important that we consider each complaint on an individual basis and the time that is needed to complete our investigation will vary depending on the complexity of the issues raised. Whilst there is no national timeframe for the completion of investigations, we will advise you of the expected number of working days we aim to respond from receipt of a complaint. However, if we do not feel that it is possible to carry out a thorough investigation within this timeframe, we will advise you of this and let you know when you can expect to receive the Trust's response.

It is important that our investigation is thorough and in complex cases the investigation may take longer. The types of things that may slow the response down are:

If your complaint is on behalf of someone else, we need to receive that person's written consent to respond to you. This is a legal requirement that we must follow.

If your complaint is very complex or involves several different people, wards, departments or external healthcare providers, obtaining the written reports can take time, particularly if each person needs to see the medical records or if anyone who is needed to respond to your complaint is away from work or no longer works for the Trust.

We appreciate that it may feel like a long time to wait. If you have any specific concerns during this time or wish to enquire about the progress of your complaint, please contact the Complaints

Department on 020 8725 1609 or by emailing  
[complaints.compliments@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints.compliments@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### **What do you mean by an “investigation”?**

We send your letter to all the departments and wards relevant to your complaint. We share your letter with anyone who is mentioned in it and with the appropriate staff. We ask for their views on the issues and an explanation of what happened. We ask for written reports and those issues are discussed with the staff involved. We also ask the ward or department involved to state what action will be taken to avoid the problem happening again.

In some cases, we will call you to ask for more information. If the problem is complicated, we will also sometimes call you to ask if you would like to meet with us at this stage. Meetings like this can be very helpful in resolving problems and we always encourage people to bring friends or relatives with them if that would be helpful.

When all the written information has been received, it is collated and a letter of response is drafted. The letter is agreed upon and signed by the Chief Nurse if they are happy with the content of the response.

### **What if I am not happy with the letter of response?**

If you are not happy with the letter of response then you can contact us again, either by telephone or in writing and let us know why. Sometimes people are unhappy because they feel that some concerns were not addressed properly in the letter of response. Again, meetings can be helpful in this case to resolve matters.

## **What if I want to take things further?**

If you are not satisfied with the letter of response and any other action, we have taken there are several other things you can do:

A meeting could be arranged between yourself and relevant staff from the Trust. This gives us time to listen to what you have to say and allows us to explain issues more fully. People who have complaints usually find these meetings very helpful. The meeting does not have to take place in one of our hospitals. If you would prefer it to be held somewhere else, we will try to arrange that.

If you want an independent opinion, we will review this request. If this request is agreed upon, we could ask a professional (for example a senior doctor or nurse) who has no connection with our hospitals to review your care and treatment in light of your complaint.

The outcome of this would be a report or reports that would be shared with you. If recommendations are made, we will consider them and tell you what will be done.

With your agreement, we could organise for an independent conciliator or mediator to try to resolve matters.

## **Where can I get help or advice?**

You are always welcome to contact the Complaints Department on 020 8725 1609 or by emailing [complaints.compliments@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints.compliments@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

If you require advice independently of the Trust, you can contact your local Independent Complaints Advocacy Service.

**For the Wandsworth and Richmond area, you can contact:**  
Rethink Advocacy

28 Albert Embankment  
London, SE1 7GR  
Tel: 0300 790 0559  
Email: [advocacyreferralhub@rethink.org](mailto:advocacyreferralhub@rethink.org)

**For the Sutton area, you can contact:**

Advocacy for All  
Phone: 0345 310 1812  
Website: [www.healthwatchsutton.org.uk/complaints-advocacy](http://www.healthwatchsutton.org.uk/complaints-advocacy).

**For the Merton area, you can contact:**

Voiceability  
United House  
North Road  
London N7 9DP  
Helpline: 0300 330 1660  
Textphone: 07860022939  
Email: [nhscomplaints@voiceability.org](mailto:nhscomplaints@voiceability.org)

**What if I remain unhappy about the investigation by the Trust?**

If you are dissatisfied with the outcome of the Local Resolution process you are entitled to go to the second stage of the NHS complaints procedure. You can contact the Health Service Ombudsman to independently review your case.

This should normally be done within 12 months of the day on which you first became aware of the matters about which you have complained.

Emphasis is placed on the NHS Complaints Procedure in resolving complaints at a local level. Therefore we will always suggest that all possible local action is taken before you approach The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.

If you raise new issues when contacting the Ombudsman, they will refer these back to us for investigation.

The Ombudsman is completely independent of the NHS and Government. You can contact the Ombudsman at:

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman  
Millbank Tower  
Millbank  
London SW1P 4QP  
Tel: 0345 015 4033  
Website: [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)  
Email: [phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk).

### **What about compensation for clinical care?**

The complaints procedure as described above does not lead to compensation for claims of clinical negligence.

Accidents and errors do happen in health care. Clinical claims are handled through our insurers, the National Health Service Litigation Authority, and not the Trust.

If you are considering making a claim you might want an independent opinion. If this is the case, then you should seek professional legal advice rather than pursue the complaints process any further.

**Action Against Medical Accidents (AvMA)** specialises in advising patients and can provide free and confidential guidance and support. AvMA is a registered charity that has medically qualified advisors who undergo legal training. Their telephone numbers are

020 8688 9555 and 0845 1232352. AvMA's address is Freedman House, Christopher Wren Yard, 117 High St, Croydon CR0 1QG. Their website is [www.avma.org.uk](http://www.avma.org.uk).

### **Recording patient ethnicity**

The Trust has a duty to record patient ethnicity for each complaint. This is to comply with the requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. We record this information to help us monitor trends. For example, it is useful for us to know whether there are certain services in which similar problems keep recurring and whether this is affecting any particular sections of the community.

If we do ask you to provide details of your ethnicity, we will do so when our letter of response is sent. Of course, you are under no obligation to provide this information. However, it would be very useful and will be treated in the strictest confidence.

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**



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