



the brain injury
association

Making a Complaint about NHS treatment

Although the majority of people are satisfied with the service that the NHS provides, some people may have reasons to complain.

Making a complaint

There is usually a time limit of six months to make a complaint from the time you were aware that you have something to complain about. However, in some cases this can be extended. The route for complaining is similar for hospitals, rehabilitation centres or GP's. Below is a brief guide to making a complaint, although there may be some variations between services. There are also variations between the different countries in the UK, so some stages may not be available or may be altered. See the 'Differences in complaints procedure across the UK' section, below, for more details.

- **Local Resolution**

The first step is usually to raise your concerns with the practitioner involved, either orally or in writing. If you do not want to do this, you can contact the service provider's complaints manager. In either case, they will be able to explain the complaints policy and guide you through the process.

This is called 'local resolution' and aims to solve the problem quickly. Try to arrange a meeting with whoever is managing the care. Write down any complaints you have to take to the meeting and make sure you are satisfied with the answers given.

- **Health Service Ombudsman**

If you are unsatisfied with the final response you receive from the service provider, you can complain to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. The Ombudsman is independent but cannot review all complaints. If the Ombudsman cannot review your case you will be put in touch with someone who can.

You can contact the Ombudsman on 0345 015 4033 or visit www.ombudsman.org.uk for more details.

- **Court**

If all else fails you can take your dispute to court. Contact the Community Legal Service on 0845 345 4 345, as they may be able to give you free legal advice.

factsheet

4 King Edward Court
King Edward Street
Nottingham
NG1 1EW

Helpline: 0808 800 2244
Minicom: 0115 958 7825
Email: helpline@headway.org.uk
Website: www.headway.org.uk



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Support services

PALS – the Patient Advice & Liaison Service (England only)

In **England**, this is a service set up to offer confidential advice and support to patients and their families and carers who have concerns about their treatment. PALS will liaise with Trust staff and managers and, if appropriate, with other PALS and healthcare organisations, to help patients. They can give you information on the NHS and health matters and advise on the complaints procedure.

You can find details of your local PALS at www.pals.nhs.uk, in your local hospital, by asking at your GP's surgery or by calling NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

ICAS – Independent Complaints Advisory Service

This service supports people who want to make a complaint about the NHS. They will help you with the complaints system and can write letters and attend meetings. To find your nearest ICAS, go to www.dh.gov.uk and search for ICAS.

Advocacy services

If you need help with making a complaint, you may be able to use an advocate. These are people who work with specific groups of people to help them access better services. Some Headway groups offer advocacy services, and with their knowledge of brain injury, they may be a good first port of call.

Your local Citizens Advice Bureau may be able to help you find a local advocacy service, or to view a directory of advocacy services online, go to www.actionforadvocacy.org.uk, and click 'Find an advocate' to search the directory. Note that there are few services specifically for brain injury, but many of the general disability services may be able to help – do contact them first to make sure they can meet your needs.

Call the Headway Helpline on 0808 800 2244 for information on your local advocacy services and contact details of Headway Groups and Branches. You can also find details of your local Headway Group or Branch by visiting our website at www.headway.org.uk and clicking the 'Your local Group' tab.

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Differences in complaints procedure across the UK

In **Scotland**, no similar service to PALS exists, but you can call NHS24, the equivalent of NHS Direct, on 0845 4 24 24 24 to discuss your options – they should be able to give you details of your local health organisation who you can contact to take your complaint forward.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO) is responsible for taking the complaint further if you are not happy with the service provider's response. You can contact the Ombudsman on 0800 377 7330 or visit www.spsso.org.uk for more details.

In **Wales**, the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales is responsible for taking your complaint further if you are not happy with the service provider's response. Visit www.ombudsman-wales.org.uk for further information or to contact the Ombudsman.

In **Northern Ireland**, the Northern Ireland Ombudsman is responsible for taking your complaint further if you are not happy with the service provider's response. Visit www.ni-ombudsman.org.uk for further information or to contact the ombudsman.

On **The Isle of Man** different procedures apply. The Isle of Man government have produced a leaflet, 'Health Service Complaints Information', which you can download from www.gov.im/dhss/health/complaints/. Please call the Headway helpline if you would like help with this.

The **Channel Islands** usually require complaints in writing if they cannot be resolved locally – speak to your GP surgery or hospital. The local divisions of the British Medical Association (BMA) can act as mediators if the problem cannot be resolved satisfactorily at local level. Visit http://www.bma.org.uk/patients_public/raisingconcernsaboutyourcare.jsp for details.

Further Information

If you have access to the Internet, you can find a complete guide to the complaints procedure on the British Medical Association's website at http://www.bma.org.uk/patients_public/raisingconcernsaboutyourcare.jsp. **If you would like to discuss any of the issues covered here, or any other aspects of brain injury, please call our free, confidential helpline on 0808 800 2244. Alternatively, you can email helpline@headway.org.uk.**

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