

# Help with your NHS Complaint – Sheet 1

## Enquiry, Feedback or Complaint?

The NHS provides good quality services to most people but sometimes things do go wrong. Very often a problem can be resolved, quickly, easily and informally but in some cases people may choose to make an official complaint.

### An enquiry

Sometimes 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 PALS office which may be able to help with enquiries such as these. PALS is the Patient Advice and Liaison Service, and their role is to ensure that the NHS listens to patients, their relatives, carers and friends, and answers their questions and resolves their concerns as quickly as possible.

### Feedback

Sometimes you may not want to go through an official complaints process. We often get people who say things like ‘I just want the NHS to learn from my experience’. On other occasions it might be that you want to tell other people that you are happy with the care you received.

If you want to give feedback this way, you are welcome to contact us at Healthwatch. Our contact details are at the bottom of the page.

### A complaint

An official complaint is a way to get your experience recorded and acted on using an official process. For an official complaint to be considered it normally needs to meet these criteria:

- Something must have happened in your NHS Care that you are unhappy with (this can apply to a close relative if you are complaining on their behalf)
- It must have happened recently enough to be covered by the national complaints regulations (usually 12 months ago or less)
- It must be possible to take some action to resolve the situation (a resolution could be something simple like someone saying ‘sorry’ or something more complex like an organisation changing the way it does something)

Making a complaint can be complicated - there is a process to follow and sometimes the language people use can be complex. It can also be a long process and so it is important to decide what you want to complain about, and what you are hoping to achieve before starting.

There is no distinction between a formal or informal complaint within the 2009 complaints regulations, and all complaints should be investigated and responded to in writing.

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Email: [NHSComplaints@healthwatcholdham.co.uk](mailto:NHSComplaints@healthwatcholdham.co.uk)

Web: [www.healthwatcholdham.co.uk](http://www.healthwatcholdham.co.uk)



## So what can you do if you're unhappy, but don't want to make a complaint?

Issues	Options
I have a problem that needs sorting right now	If possible, speak to the people giving you your care. They may be able to resolve it quickly and without fuss. If you can't get an easy resolution that way, try PALS
I want a copy of my medical records	You have a right to this under the Data Protection Act. You should make a 'data subject access request' to the head office of the organisation(s) giving you your care
I don't want this to happen to anyone else  Or  I want systems in the hospital (or other NHS service provider) to change	Making a complaint is a way to make sure your experience comes to the attention of people who have the power to make changes  Alternatively, you can contact Healthwatch and fill in one of our 'Tell Your Story' forms. These help us to raise concerns about serious problems and to spot patterns (e.g. if the same thing goes wrong for lots of patients)
I need an appointment rearranging	Speak to PALS - they may be able to rearrange it for you or they may be able to give you the direct contact details of the relevant person
I want to know some more general information about my diagnosis	Healthwatch Oldham runs an information signposting service. We can help you to access other sources of information
The problem can't be resolved by PALS	Make an official complaint if you still want the issue to be resolved

