

Sheffield Advocacy Hub

NHS Complaints Advocacy

**Self Help
Information Pack**

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Sheffield
Citizens Advice &
Law Centre



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Cloverleaf
Advocacy



Disability Sheffield
Centre for Independent Living

Introduction

The National Health Service (NHS), and other providers of NHS services, work hard to treat everyone properly and promptly. Most people using health services are satisfied with their treatment (or the treatment of family/friends/partners) but sometimes things can go wrong.

If you are dissatisfied with the service you, or others have received from a hospital, doctor, dentist, local surgery or any other NHS-funded service, you have the right to raise your concerns about it by making an NHS complaint.

By raising your concerns, it can help put things right quickly and the NHS can learn from your experience. A response to your concerns could include an explanation, an apology and information about how the NHS provider has used your experience to improve services or care.

How to use this pack

This pack aims to help you feel confident about raising your concerns yourself. The pack:

- Explains the different options for raising your concerns about the NHS
- Offers practical tips and things for you to think about
- Tells you how NHS Complaints Advocacy can help you

This booklet is divided into sections that explain each step of the process in detail.

How can NHS Complaints Advocacy help?

NHS Complaints Advocacy can help you raise a concern about NHS care or treatment.

This service is:

- Free
- Independent of the NHS
- Confidential



You can contact our advocates by telephone, email, letter or through our website if you require assistance to raise your concerns. They will take time to listen to your experience and, if you need assistance, they can then talk to you about what support you need to make your complaint.

Your advocate will be able to give you information about the different ways that you can raise your concerns with the NHS provider (see step 3) so that you are able to choose how you want to proceed.

Your advocate can also help you think about what you would like to achieve from your complaint. People want different outcomes when they complain such as an apology, an explanation or an improvement to NHS services.

Advocates can:

- Give you an opportunity to speak confidentially to someone who is independent of the NHS
- Explore the options available to you at each step of the complaints procedure
- Help you with writing an effective letter to the right people if required
- Prepare you for meetings and accompany you where necessary
- Contact and speak to third parties if you wish us to
- Help you decide whether you are satisfied with the response you receive from the NHS provider

Your advocate will not try to persuade you to take a particular course of action and will always respect your decisions.

Raising Concerns and Complaints About the NHS – First Steps

Step 1: What are you concerned about?

Before you start, it is important to be clear about what your concerns are with the NHS treatment or care received. This can be any aspect of NHS care and services, but might include:

- Treatment or care
- The attitude of staff
- Poor communication
- Waiting times
- Lack of information
- Failure to diagnose a condition

Here are some 'real-life' examples of issues raised:

- An emergency ambulance took over an hour to arrive
- A patient was given incorrect information about a medical procedure and suffered pain as a result
- A GP refused to do a home visit
- An elderly patient frequently had to wait a long time for routine transport home from hospital appointments
- A patient felt that a nurse had treated him without respect
- A patient did not get the support they needed following discharge from hospital because of a lack of communication between the hospital and social care services

Useful Tip: Write down what your concerns are, as simply and clearly as you can, so that you can refer back to it later.

If you need help to write down what you want to complain about or would like to talk through the issues with an advocate you can contact Sheffield Advocacy Hub.

Step 2: What do you want to achieve?

Think about what you want to achieve. Your issues are more likely to be dealt with smoothly if you can be specific and realistic.

When raising a concern with the NHS you can expect:

- To be treated with respect and courtesy
- To be offered support to help you raise your concerns
- A speedy solution to be offered where possible
- An explanation of what happened
- An apology if appropriate
- Changes to be made so that the same thing will not happen to anyone else
- Better communication between NHS staff and patients

NHS Complaints advocates can only support you if your complaint is about NHS funded healthcare.

There are some limits on what can be achieved using the NHS Complaints Procedure. Where the outcome you are looking for would be more likely to be achieved through another route, your advocate can explain this and give you information about who is best to contact instead.

Financial compensation for clinical negligence:

- This is usually possible only through legal action
- You need to speak to a solicitor who specialises in medical or clinical negligence
- There are time limits for making a legal claim and it is best to contact a solicitor within three years of the incident

Disciplinary action against any NHS staff member:

- The NHS Complaints Procedure cannot be used to take disciplinary action against a member of staff
- This could however, happen under a separate procedure as a result of an investigation into your complaint. You would not, however, be informed of any disciplinary action that was taken.

Private healthcare complaints:

- If you have paid for private treatment or used medical insurance you cannot use the NHS Complaints Procedure
- If however, your treatment was funded by the NHS, you can still use the NHS Complaints Procedure

Care home and nursing home complaints:

- If the care home or nursing home is paid for by the NHS you can make a complaint using the NHS Complaints Procedure
- If the care home or nursing home is paid for privately you cannot make a complaint using the NHS Complaints Procedure. Most care homes and nursing homes will, however, have their own complaints procedure so you can make a complaint using this.

We can give you information about other options and who to contact if the outcome that you are looking for cannot be obtained through the NHS complaints process.

Step 3: Where to send your complaint

You can explain what happened to you or the person you are complaining on behalf of:

- In person
- On the telephone
- By email
- In a letter

Useful tip: If you send a written complaint, keep a copy of your letter to refer to later (whether you send it by post or email).

Formal complaints about the NHS are often made in writing, however NHS providers should be able to take your complaint verbally if required. They should provide you with a written summary of your complaint if you make it verbally.

All NHS organisations have complaints procedures and in most cases they will probably be best placed to deal with your complaint. However, you can complain about the NHS provider to the Commissioner of that service if you would prefer to do so. They will contact the NHS provider and investigate your complaint and respond to you. **However, you cannot ask for both the NHS Trust and the Commissioner to investigate it.**

If your complaint is about a hospital, this should be made to the Chief Executive of the NHS Trust. You can also choose for the Commissioner of the service you are complaining about to handle your complaint instead. This may be the local Integrated Care Board (ICB) or NHS England (for some specialist services).

If your complaint is about Community NHS services such as District Nurse, Podiatry and Chiropody, this should be made to the appropriate NHS Trust. If you are unsure who this is, you can ask Sheffield Advocacy Hub on 0800 035 0396 or NHS England Tel: 03003112233. You can also choose for the Commissioner of the service you are complaining about to handle your complaint instead. This may be the local Integrated Care Board (ICB) or NHS England (for some specialist services).

If your complaint is about a GP, Dentist, Optician or Pharmacist you should make your complaint direct to them or to the Manager of the service. If you do not wish to make your

complaint to the provider directly, you can send your complaint to the commissioner who is the local Integrated Health Board (ICB) which in Sheffield is the South Yorkshire ICB.

South Yorkshire ICB - you can make your complaint to them as a commissioner of the service you are complaining about by:

- post to Sheffield ICB, 197 Eyre Street, Sheffield S1 3FG
- email to syicb-sheffield.icbcomplaints@nhs.net with 'Sheffield' in the subject line
- telephone: **0333 041 0021**

Provide as much information as possible to allow South Yorkshire ICB to investigate your complaint. Include some or all of the following:

- Your name
- A clear explanation of your complaint
- Copies of earlier associated correspondence relating to the complaint; and
- Any valid correspondence case referral numbers

The timescale for responding to your complaint will be discussed with you and will depend upon the complexity of the complaint. Where the agreed timescale cannot be met, you will be informed of this.

If your complaint is about a Public Health Service such as Prevention and Lifestyle services such as Health Visitors, which come under Local Authorities, the complaint is no longer NHS related and should be made to your Local Authority.

If you are unsure about who to make your complaint to, you can ask for advice from PALS or the Complaints Departments in larger organisations such as hospitals. Many NHS organisations will have details of how to contact them about complaints on their website. Alternatively, contact Sheffield Advocacy Hub and we will be able to support you to find out the right information.

If your complaint concerns more than one NHS organisation, you only need to send a letter to one of the organisations. You can ask them to liaise with the other organisation(s) involved and provide a co-ordinated response.

If your complaint is about social care services - There are separate complaints procedures for social care complaints. Although the NHS Complaints Advocacy cannot support you with

complaints in these cases, we will point you in the right direction of where to get help. The NHS Complaints Advocacy service can support you in complaining about NHS Services that include a social care element. An example of this might be you wanting to make a complaint to the hospital about your discharge but where part of the complaint relates to the social care services provided when you arrived home.

If you are still not satisfied, you can apply to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and request an independent investigation into your complaint. The Ombudsman will usually only look at a complaint once you have exhausted the complaints process locally with the service, Trust or commissioner, who should let you know in writing when they can do no more to answer your concerns. The final decision of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman brings the end of the NHS Complaints Procedure. There is however a right to appeal their decision if you think you have reason to do so. For this you should contact the Ombudsman directly for advice. An advocate can help you to do this.

The NHS Complaints Procedure



The NHS Complaints Procedure focuses on resolving your complaint locally.

Local Resolution

The aim of Local Resolution is to try to sort out your problem directly with the NHS Service. The NHS healthcare provider should respond to you efficiently, sensitively and promptly.

Local Resolution is your opportunity to explain what it is you are concerned or dissatisfied about and what you would like to happen. It gives you the opportunity to raise your concerns to the NHS service and be heard. Local Resolution is important because it aims to resolve your concerns and, where appropriate, use your experiences to improve local services

It is best to raise everything that you are concerned about at this point, although new issues can be introduced later as part of the same complaint.

It is helpful to keep a record of any telephone calls you make and letters you write or receive about your complaint. To help you do this, a Log Sheet is included in this pack. You can fill in all the details of who you wrote or spoke to, what was agreed and when it needs to be done by.

Are there time limits for making a complaint?

Generally, you should make your complaint within:

- Twelve months of the incident happening or
- Within twelve months of you realising that you have concerns

The NHS can use its discretion to look at issues that are beyond these timescales. For instance, if you were too ill to make the complaint straight away, the NHS will consider if it is still possible to investigate the complaint effectively and fairly.

What will happen next?

Sometimes it may be possible to resolve your concerns immediately, if you receive a quick response from the NHS provider that you are satisfied with.

If this is not the case, the NHS provider should acknowledge your complaint either verbally or in writing within three working days.

The NHS provider, will, in most cases:

- Offer to contact you to discuss your complaint and how best to resolve your concerns. They should agree with you a timescale for resolving the issues and discuss how they will keep you informed or progress. The suggested timescales can be influenced by things like how many staff they need to speak to, how easy it is for them to access your medical records and if other organisations are involved in your complaint. If there is a problem in keeping to the agreed timescale they should contact you before it expires to agree an amended timescale.
- Undertake an investigation in order to be able to provide a written response to your complaint.
- Write to you once they have looked into your complaint and respond to the issues you raised and offer a resolution.
- Offer assistance to enable you to understand the complaints procedure or advice on where to obtain such assistance, such as, from your local NHS Complaints Advocacy provider.

Investigating and resolving your complaint:

- You may be offered a meeting to discuss your complaint and speak to staff directly about what has happened. You can take a friend, relative and/or advocate with you to any meetings that you might have. You can ask for a meeting to be held in your complaint letter, although there is no obligation for this to be done under the complaint regulations.
- In some cases, the NHS uses Conciliation or Mediation services. A conciliator or mediator is a neutral and independent person who can arrange a meeting with you and those involved (either separately or together) so you can all express your views and try to resolve your differences.

A conciliator will become involved only if everyone affected agrees. The conciliation process is confidential.

Conciliation and Mediation Services differ from Trust to Trust so if this is offered, you should ask the Complaints Manager to explain how it operates in your area.

Useful tip: Where your complaint is not resolved with a written response from the provider and a meeting is arranged instead, it may be helpful to prepare a list of questions you want to ask at your meeting and take this with you. Giving this to the provider ahead of the meeting can help them to ensure that they have the right staff present, and have the relevant information with them, to answer these questions.

Try to keep these questions clear and concise. It is also helpful to take any relevant paperwork with you to the meeting. An advocate can assist you to prepare for the meeting and attend it with you.

What if I am not satisfied at the end of Local Resolution?

If you are not satisfied with the reply, ask yourself exactly what you are still dissatisfied about so you can decide what to do next. It may help to review:

- The letters
- Any meetings
- Any conciliation or mediation process
- Whether the plan you agreed, if relevant, was followed
- Whether parts of your complaint have yet to be answered
- Whether you feel evidence you gave was not properly considered
- Whether you have achieved the outcome you wanted
- What more, if anything, could have been done to achieve the outcome
- Whether the Complaints Manager has followed the Ombudsman's good complaints handling principles.

What are my options?

- You could write another letter explaining what you think has not been covered
- You could call the person handling your complaint and explain why you are still dissatisfied
- You could request a meeting to discuss your outstanding concerns
- You may choose to try a different route to achieve the outcome you want – review your options on the next page.

Further investigation into your complaint may be carried out. Again, the NHS organisation you are complaining about may feel that everything has been done to answer your complaint and if so, they should advise you of that in writing. You cannot usually contact the Ombudsman and ask them to investigate until you have this 'final response' from the organisation:

This is the end of Local Resolution



The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

Once Local Resolution has finished, if you remain unhappy with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the NHS provider, you have the right to take your complaint to the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman may help resolve complaints about the NHS. The Ombudsman is independent of the NHS and of Government and their powers are set down in law. Their service is confidential and free.

You can find out more about how they can help by contacting them on the following:

- Visit www.ombudsman.org.uk
- Tel: 0345 015 4033
- You can contact them via text phone on 0300 061 4298 if you have a hearing impairment or have problems using a standard telephone
- Email: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk
- Text 'call back' with your name and mobile number to 07624 813 005 and they will call you back
- Write to: Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4QP

Timescales – By law, you should usually submit a complaint to the Ombudsman within one year of when you first became aware of the problem you are complaining about. If it was more than one year ago, the Ombudsman may still be able to help you if there were good reasons for the delay.

When receiving your complaint, the Ombudsman will first look at whether it is something that they are able to look at by law. To find out more about what organisations and issues the Ombudsman can look at, visit their website (www.ombudsman.org.uk) or telephone: 0345 015 4033.

The Ombudsman will usually only investigate a complaint after the NHS have had the chance to try and sort it out. They will ask you for a copy of the final response letter from the organisation you initially complained to. The Ombudsman may find that they can get your problem resolved quickly by talking to the organisation you are unhappy about.

If the Ombudsman can see that there is more that the organisation could do to resolve your issues locally, they will ask them to do more work. If the organisation is not responding to your complaint, the Ombudsman can ask that they provide a response.

When the Ombudsman carries out an investigation, they will look in detail at what's happened. They will look at all the facts. When doing that, they may need to gather additional information by speaking to you and the organisation concerned. They may need to see your clinical records and other papers relating to your complaint and may take expert advice to make sure they have a clear view of what happened and what should have happened. Every complaint is different and the steps they will take during an investigation may vary.

What happens next?

If the Ombudsman decides that the NHS have got things wrong, they will explain that decision and recommend how things can be put right. This could mean asking the organisation to acknowledge their mistakes and providing an apology to you. It could also include asking the organisation to compensate you or give you a better explanation of their actions.

The Ombudsman may decide that the organisation has acted correctly or that there was a problem but they have already done enough to put things right. When this happens, the Ombudsman will always explain why they have decided this. Often that means sharing any expert advice they have received and giving more information about what happened.

The Ombudsman's decision

The Ombudsman's decision about your complaint is final. This includes their decision whether or not to investigate your complaint and their decision whether or not to uphold your complaint following an investigation.

If you think that the Ombudsman's decision on your complaint is wrong, they can however, under certain circumstances, review their decision. Please note that a review does not mean that the Ombudsman will look at your original complaint again. Instead it means the Ombudsman will look to see if they took into account all the relevant evidence and made a fair decision based on this.

If you still disagree with the Ombudsman's response you can challenge it through the courts using judicial review. However, this is outside the NHS complaints procedure and advocacy support is not available for this. It may incur a cost to you.

Useful tip: Complete the Ombudsman's form and gather together all supporting information at the time of submitting this to the Ombudsman. Our advocates can support you to do this if you require assistance.

Questions and Answers

Who can complain?

Any NHS patient can complain about any NHS service, or NHS funded care, they have received and are dissatisfied with. You can complain on behalf of someone else in certain circumstances (see more below). NHS services include treatment and care given by your GP, dental surgery, opticians, pharmacist, hospital, community health service and the ambulance service. Anyone who is affected, or likely to be affected by the action, omission or decision of an NHS body can make a complaint.

My mother is elderly and I don't feel she could manage a complaints process. Can I complain for her?

You may complain for a friend, partner or relative as long as they agree to let you complain on their behalf. It is useful to get their permission in writing. We have included a 'consent and confidentiality form' in this pack which you could use.

My partner has Alzheimer's Disease, do I still need her permission to make a complaint?

If your friend, partner or relative is very ill, or does not have the capacity to give permission because of an impairment or disability, you may complain on their behalf without their permission, although the NHS Trust will confirm the patient's lack of capacity before accepting the complaint. If they do not accept the complaint, they must inform you in writing if they do make this decision and tell you why.

My father died and I didn't have his consent to act for him. Can I make a complaint about his treatment?

Yes, you may raise a complaint or take over a complaint on behalf of a friend, partner or relative who has died, even if you do not have their written permission. In some cases the NHS may decide not to accept you as a suitable representative. They will discuss this with you.

My nephew is 15 and has Down's Syndrome, can I complain on his behalf without his written permission?

A complaint can be made on behalf of a child (under 18) if the child is unable to make the complaint themselves.

NHS organisations must not consider a complaint made by a representative of a child unless they are sure that the child is unable to complain themselves. They must inform you in writing if they make this decision and tell you why.

Can I complain about something that happened in the past?

It depends on how long ago it happened. You should make your complaint:

- Within 12 months of the incident happening OR
- Within 12 months of you realising you had something to complain about.

NHS organisations are allowed to waive this time limit if there are good reasons why you could not complain earlier. One such case might be if you were too ill to complain at the time.

I had an operation in a private hospital. Can I complain to the NHS?

It depends. If the NHS paid for your operation in a private hospital, you can complain to the NHS. If you paid for your treatment yourself, or with private medical insurance, you cannot complain to the NHS. The private hospital will have its own complaints procedure that you should follow.

I want to sue the surgeon who operated on me. How do I go about it?

You will need to take legal action if you want to make a claim for clinical negligence. The NHS Complaints Procedure does not deal with these cases. You can find details of local specialist solicitors by contacting the Law Society.

Telephone 0207 424 1222 or visit www.lawsociety.org.uk, or Action Against Medical Accidents (AvMA), Tel: 0845 123 2352 or visit www.avma.org.uk.

Writing a Complaint Letter

The letter should clearly outline your complaint and you should ask for it to be investigated under the NHS Complaints Procedures. If you are writing on behalf of someone else who is a patient, rather than for yourself, you must show that you have the patient's permission.

Helpful tips

Be brief

- Try to keep your complaint to no more than two pages
- Be careful not to lose your main points in a long letter
- If the complaint is long and complex, attach a log sheet or diary of events with details

Be clear and straightforward

- Use short sentences
- Don't be afraid to say what has upset you, but avoid aggressive or accusing language
- Don't repeat yourself

Be constructive

- Your complaint is an opportunity to improve things
- Put your concerns politely, but firmly explain what you would like to achieve as a result of your complaint for example an apology, an explanation, a service improvement or any other remedy

Keep copies

- Keep a copy of all letters or emails sent and received, in date order, and a note of all telephone calls made.

Send photocopies of documents, not originals

- Keep the original documents in your possession

Make sure your letter is received

- You may wish to send it by guaranteed or recorded delivery

Example framework for a first letter of complaint

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

*Insert your address
and telephone number*

The Chief Executive or Complaints Manager (*name if known*)

Followed by the name and address of their organisation

Date

Dear

Re: NHS Complaint – *patient's name*, Date of Birth: , NHS number:

I am writing to complain about the treatment I received from (name(s) of staff) **at** (place) where incident happened/treatment received) **on** (date of incident/period of treatment).

OR (if you are acting on behalf of the patient)

I am writing on behalf of (insert name of patient), **and enclose their written agreement to act on their behalf.** (If the patient is unable to give consent for example, if they are too young, ill or deceased, then you should explain this).

Describe:

What happened

When, and

Where

If you were unable to recall events because you were undergoing surgery (for instance) include information provided by third parties and how they were made aware of this.

If you have a log sheet or list of events, you can attach this as a separate sheet and refer to this here. Explain what, if anything, you have already done to try to resolve matters.

I would like the following points to be addressed in the response to the complaint:

Put the most important matters first

Explain why you are not satisfied

Be clear and brief

Number or bullet your points

As the questions you would like the answers to and list them in order of importance

As a result of this complaint I would now like

Say what you want to achieve, for example:

An explanation of what happened

An apology

Action to remedy the problem you experienced, by a named person

I look forward to receiving your acknowledgement of this letter. 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. Thank you for your attention to this complaint. I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Your signature

Print your name

*If you are sending copies of your letter to other people, show this here: **cc. Other person***

Complaint letter sample

Mrs A Smith
1 The Avenue
Your town
AT1 2AB
Tel: 0102323205

Helen Clarke
The Complaints Manager
Petersfield Surgery
4 Main Street
Your Town
AT1 2CD

30 March 2018

Dear Helen Clarke

Re: NHS Complaint – Mrs A Smith, DOB 19 May 1963

I am writing to complaint about the way I have been treated by Dr Hayton at Petersfield Surgery.

I was seen by Dr Hayton three times, on 24th April, 31st May and 10th December 2012. He did not examine me or do any tests. I feel that he did not take my symptoms seriously and said my problem was due to stress and that I should take things easy.

I was feeling so unwell and found his dismissive attitude upsetting. I was worried so I made an appointment to see another doctor in the practice. I do not know his name but it will be in my notes.

This doctor examined me on 7th January 2013 and arranged for tests. These showed that I was diabetic. I was prescribed medication and a special diet and I am not feeling much better. During the period from April 2012 to January 2013, however, I suffered with several infections, sleepless nights and I was very distressed.

I have tried to raise my concerns with Dr Hayton but he would not listen.

I would like the following points to be addressed in response to this complaint.

- Is my medical condition poorer as a result of my diabetes not being detected and diagnosed by Dr Hayton on previous appointments?
- Why did Dr Hayton not order any tests?

Along with answers to my questions, I would now like:

- Dr Hayton's attitude to patients to be reviewed
- Dr Hayton to explain why he did not listen to me or examine me
- An apology from for the unnecessary stress and poor health I suffered because of his inadequate care
- To know what arrangements the practice has for reviewing the listening skills of the doctors

I have had very good care from the practice in the past, in particular from Dr Conner until he retired. I was then moved to Dr Hayton. I would like to regain confidence in the care provided by the practice.

I would appreciate it if you would carry out a full investigation into my concerns, and provide a response in accordance with the NHS Complaints Procedure.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Mrs A Smith

What to Expect at an NHS Complaints Meeting

What is a complaints meeting?

A complaints meeting often takes place as part of the complaints process. You can request a meeting with the NHS when you first submit your letter of complaint to them if you would prefer a face to face meeting to discuss your issues, rather than receive a written response. Alternatively, you may request a meeting after you have received a written response, to allow you to discuss some aspects in more detail or to raise further concerns, in order to fully resolve your complaint.

How can an NHS Complaints Advocate support me?

For some people attending a complaints meeting can feel quite daunting and so they wish an Advocate to help them prepare for the complaints meeting and also attend it with them. Your Advocate shall normally arrange to meet you 15-30 minutes before the complaints meeting so you can have a chat about how you are feeling about the meeting and in what way you would like them to support you, such as just being there with you or reading the questions out for you, or in some other way. Other people prefer to know that they have the support of an Advocate, but attend the meeting without them. Please discuss with your Advocate what support you would like from them.

How do I prepare for a complaints meeting?

Most NHS Complaints Teams will ask you to provide them with the questions you wish to be addressed at the meeting, or a list of points, also known as an agenda, before they arrange a complaints meeting. It may be that you have included this information in your letter of complaint to them. Having this information helps them ensure that the right people who can address your points are at the meeting. It also helps those who will be giving the answers to your questions time to prepare so that as much information as possible can be provided to you on the day. An agenda can also be used to give the meeting structure and focus, making it easier to ensure that all your points are addressed in the time available. Please ask your Advocate for help with doing this if you would like this support. It is also useful to take copies of any letters about your complaint to the meeting for if you need to refer to them.

Who will be at a complaints meeting?

This can vary depending on which NHS organisation your complaint has been made to, who you may have requested to attend the complaints meeting and who is best able to provide the answers you need. Usually a member of the NHS Complaints Team shall be in

attendance to facilitate the meeting, and also someone to take down notes of what is said at the meeting, although some meetings are now audio recorded. There shall also be people there who your complaint directly relates to, such as a Doctor/Consultant, Head of Department, Matron/Ward Manager, Practice Manager or GP Partner. If your complaint concerns a particular individual it may not be possible, or appropriate, for them to be in attendance.

Who can come with me to a complaints meeting?

You can take someone such as a spouse, partner, other family member or friend. There are usually no set restrictions on how many people can go with you, but it is practical to keep the number as low as possible. You may also wish an Advocate to attend with you. The NHS Complaints Team will need to be notified who will be attending with you. You will usually be sent a letter confirming when and where the complaints meeting will take place and who will be present. Please note that you cannot take a legal representative to a meeting arranged as part of the NHS Complaints process.

What can I expect at a complaints meeting?

Normally someone from the NHS Complaints Team will collect you from a waiting room and escort you to the meeting room. The staff will introduce themselves and you will usually be asked to introduce yourself too. The points you have raised, or your agenda, will be discussed. You will have the opportunity to ask more questions or for more information in order to answer your questions fully.

There is sometimes a time limit to the meeting, so if this has been stated, be aware of the time. You may wish to list your questions in order of importance to you or on occasion it is sometimes better to move on to your next point and 'agree to disagree'.

If an Advocate is at the meeting they will not be there as a notetaker – they are there to support you. Please also note that your Advocate cannot attend medical appointments, they can only attend meetings set up through the NHS complaints procedure.

When you are at a complaints meeting it is important to:

- Be clear about the outcomes you would like to achieve in order to resolve your complaint.
- Avoid going over the same information that was detailed in your letter.
- Give people time to answer questions – try not to interrupt.
- Ask for further clarification or simpler explanations if information is unclear or



Sheffield
Citizens Advice &
Law Centre



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Cloverleaf
Advocacy



Disability Sheffield
Centre for Independent Living

confusing.

- Ask for a break if you feel upset or frustrated – your Advocate can do this for you if necessary.

Following the complaints meeting you will normally be provided with a written summary or an audio recording of the meeting.

Remember, the aim of a complaints meeting is to provide you with an opportunity to discuss your complaint and have questions that are important to you answered in full with a view to resolving your complaint to your satisfaction.

If you have any further questions about a complaints meeting, please speak with your Advocate.



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