



**The Dudley Group**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **The NHS complaints procedure**

**Patient Information Leaflet**

## What should I do before I make a complaint?

Clinical staff can explain your condition, treatment or clinical procedure to you. You should always try and talk to your doctor, nurse, or other health professional about any concerns you may have about the treatment or service you have received.

The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) may also be able to help you. They provide support and assistance to patients. Please contact PALS if you need advice or information about how to raise a concern or make a complaint.

## What will PALS do?

They will listen closely to what you have to say and will try to resolve any problems quickly and satisfactorily. If they cannot help you themselves, they will be able to point you in the right direction.

## How do I contact PALS?

### PALS contact details:

**Freephone:** 0800 073 0510 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

**Email:** [dgft.pals@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.pals@nhs.net)

A 24-hour answerphone service is available, and staff will return your call as soon as possible. If your concern or complaint is about a GP, family dentist, pharmacist, or optician, please speak to the individual practice or service in the first instance. Alternatively, contact the local commissioner or NHS England on 0300 311 22 33.

## Who can complain?

Anyone who is receiving or has received NHS treatment or services can complain. You can complain about your care or on behalf of a relative / friend about the care they have received, but we will require their consent for you to represent them. The person raising a complaint is known as 'the complainant'.

## When should I complain?

It is always best to make your complaint as soon as possible and not more than 12 months after the incident. This time limit may sometimes be waived if there is a genuine reason why you could not make a complaint sooner.

## What does the Trust need to know about my complaint?

You should phone us or write / email a letter of complaint and give as much information as possible about what, where and when it happened. Do not forget to include your full name, address, telephone number, date of birth and your NHS / hospital number, if you know it. Wherever possible, you should give the name and the job title of any member of staff involved in the complaint. Please indicate how you would like your complaint to be resolved (eg over the telephone, by having a meeting, by a written response, and the outcome you hope for).

## Who should I send my complaint letter to?

You can send your letter to the Chief Executive or the Complaints Department. They will make sure your complaint is acknowledged and investigated.

**Address:** Complaints Department  
Trust Headquarters  
South Block  
Russells Hall Hospital  
Pensnett Road  
Dudley  
DY1 2HQ

**Telephone:** 01384 321035 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

**Email:** [dgft.complaints@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.complaints@nhs.net)

A 24-hour answerphone service is available, and staff will return your call as soon as possible.

We will consider all accessibility and reasonable adjustment requirements of people who wish to make a complaint in an alternative way. We will record any reasonable adjustments we make.

## Confidentiality

We will maintain confidentiality and protect privacy throughout the complaints process in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018. We will only collect and disclose information to those staff who are involved in the consideration of the complaint. Documents relating to a complaint investigation are securely stored and kept separately from medical records or other patient records. They are only accessible to staff involved in the consideration of the complaint.

Complaint outcomes may be anonymised and shared within our organisation and may be published on our website to promote service improvement.

## Where can I get support with making a formal complaint?

The NHS Complaints Advocacy Service is a free and independent service that can assist you to make a complaint.

**Phone:** 0300 303 1660  
**Email:** [helpline@voiceability.org](mailto:helpline@voiceability.org)  
**Address:** VoiceAbility  
c/o Sayer Vincent  
Invicta House  
108-114 Golden Lane  
London  
EC1Y 0TL

## How we handle your complaint

We will acknowledge a complaint within three working days of receiving it. This can be done in writing, electronically or verbally.

The complaint investigation may include identifying issues that could or should:

- Trigger a patient safety investigation.
- Trigger our safeguarding procedure.
- Trigger a relevant regulatory process, such as fitness to practice investigations or referrals.

When another process may be better suited to cover other potential outcomes, our staff will seek advice and provide clear information to you. We will make sure you understand why this is relevant and the options available.

In such cases, the complaint investigation may need to be put on hold until those processes conclude.

## **Complaints that can be resolved quickly - early resolution**

When we receive a complaint, we are committed to making sure it is addressed and resolved at the earliest opportunity (known as early resolution). Our staff are trained to identify any complaints that can be resolved at the time they are raised or very soon after. If staff consider that the issues cannot be resolved quickly, your complaint will continue under the formal complaints process with an anticipated timescale of 30 working days for completion (as detailed below).

If we can answer or address the complaint early, we will ask relevant staff members to contact you to discuss and resolve your concerns within three working days. This will often be done over the telephone.

We will capture a summary of the complaint and how we resolved it, and we will share this with you. We will use this data to help us improve our services for others.

If we are unable to resolve your complaint through the early resolution route to your satisfaction, we can continue the process through a formal complaint investigation.

Not every complaint can be resolved quickly and sometimes we will require a longer period of time to carry out an investigation.

## Complaints involving multiple organisations

If we receive a complaint that involves other organisations (including cases that cover health and social care issues) we will make sure that we investigate in collaboration with those organisations.

The people managing the complaint for each organisation will agree who will be the 'lead organisation' responsible for overseeing and coordinating the complaint.

The person investigating the complaint for the lead organisation will be responsible for making sure you are kept involved and updated throughout. They will also make sure that you receive a single joint response (where possible).

## Formal complaint investigation

Staff who carry out investigations will give a clear and balanced explanation of what happened and what should have happened. They will reference relevant legislation, standards, policies, procedures, and guidance to clearly identify if something has gone wrong.

They will make sure the investigation clearly addresses all of the issues raised. This includes obtaining evidence from you and from any staff involved or specifically complained about.

We will aim to complete our investigation within 30 working days. Should circumstances change, we will:

- Notify you.
- Explain the reasons for the delay.
- Provide a new target timescale for completion.

As soon as practical after the investigation is finished, a written response will be sent to you. You may wish to meet with senior staff involved in the care given, and such a meeting can be arranged instead of a written response or following any written response, if preferred.

## What happens if I am not happy with the response to my complaint?

If you are not happy with the response to your complaint, please contact the Complaints Department who can arrange for your complaint to be reviewed.

Alternatively, you can ask the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) to review your case.

Please note that the PHSO will not investigate a complaint until we have fully investigated and responded to your concerns (this is known as local resolution).

### **Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman contact details:**

**Phone:** 0345 015 4033

**Web:** [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk)

**Address:** Millbank Tower, London, SW1P 4QP

### **Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman contact details:**

**Phone:** 0300 061 0614

**Web:** [www.lgo.org.uk](http://www.lgo.org.uk)

**Address:** PO Box 4771, Coventry, CV4 0EH

## Complaints about a private provider of our NHS services

This complaint handling procedure applies to all NHS services provided. If the complaint relates solely to private healthcare, we will direct the complaint to the relevant process.

## Complaining to the commissioner of our service

You have a choice of complaining to us, as the provider of the service, or to the commissioner of our service, The Black Country Integrated Care Board. If a complaint is made to our commissioner, they will determine how to handle the complaint in discussion with you.

In some cases, it may be agreed between you and the commissioner that we, as the provider of the service, are best placed to deal with the complaint. If so, they will seek consent from you. If that consent is given, they will forward the complaint to us, and we will investigate the complaint.

In other cases, the commissioner of our services may decide that it is best placed to handle the complaint itself. We will co-operate fully in the investigation.

**The Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) can be contacted by:**

**Phone:** 0121 612 4110

**Email:** [bcicb.time2talk@nhs.net](mailto:bcicb.time2talk@nhs.net)

**Address:** Time2Talk  
NHS Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB)  
Civic Centre  
St Peter's Square  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 1SH

**Operational hours:** Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays),  
9am – 5pm

**If you would like this information in an alternative language or format, for example in large print or easy read, please call us on 01384 321035 or email [dgft.complaints@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.complaints@nhs.net) or write to the Complaints Department.**