



# Writing a complaint letter



## Writing a complaint letter

### General guidelines

#### Who do I complain to?

If you want to complain about a hospital or an ambulance service contact the Complaints Manager or the Chief Executive of the NHS Trust.

If you are not clear where to send your complaint ask for advice from Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) or the Complaints Department at the hospital or from ICAS. Alternatively, most hospital Trusts have details of how to contact them about complaints on their website.

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

For complaints about primary care and independent providers such as your GP, dentist, optician, pharmacist, health centre or other independent NHS contractor, you have two options:

- a) You can complain directly to the NHS organisation by contacting the person in charge of complaints. In most GP and dental practices, this will be the Practice Manager.

**Or**

- b) You can complain to the Primary Care Trust (PCT). The PCT is responsible for care in your local area and they work closely with primary care practitioners such as GPs and dentists.

Note: If you choose to make a complaint directly to the organisation (option a), and you are not satisfied with their response you cannot then raise the same issue with the PCT but must go directly to the Health Service Ombudsman (HSO).

### Writing and sending the complaint letter

The letter should clearly outline your complaint and should ask for it to be investigated under the NHS Complaints Procedure. 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. (We have included a consent and confidentiality form in this pack which you could use).

## 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, avoid aggressive or accusing language
- try not to 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. E.g. an apology, an explanation, a service improvement, any other remedy.

### Keep copies

- keep a copy of all letters sent and received in date order.

### 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.

## What happens next?

You should receive a letter of acknowledgement within three working days.

The NHS should contact you to discuss your complaint and arrange a plan to resolve your concerns with you. This means that they will discuss how best to resolve your concerns and what you hope to achieve from raising them. They should also agree with you a timescale for resolving the issues and keep you informed of 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 NHS organisations are involved in your complaint. If there is a problem in keeping to this timescale they should contact you before it expires to agree an amended timescale.

If your complaint involves a service that is provided in partnership with the NHS, such as some Social Services there is a separate complaints procedure for Social Services. In these cases you may need more advice, **so do not hesitate to contact ICAS**. Although ICAS can only help with NHS complaints, we will point you in the right direction of where to get help with other parts of your complaint that involve a non NHS organisation. You will only need to send a letter to one of the organisations who will liaise with the others involved and provide you with a co-ordinated response.

## Example framework for a first letter of complaint

**PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL**  
**Insert your address**  
**and telephone number**

### **The Complaints Manager (name if known)**

Followed by the name and address  
of their organisation

- GP
- Dental Surgery
- Hospital Trust or
- Primary Care Trust

Date

**Dear....**

### **Re: NHS Complaint - Complainant Name, Date of Birth**

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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 I 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 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 and  
resolve matters.

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

- Put the most important matters first
- Explain why you are not satisfied
- Be clear and brief
- Number or bullet your points
- Ask 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.

Yours sincerely (if you have named the Complaints Lead)

OR

Yours faithfully (if you have not named the Complaints lead)

Your signature

Print your name

If you are sending copies of your letter to other parties, show this here

cc. Other party

1 The Avenue,  
Anytown,  
AT1 2AB  
Tel: 010 232 3205

Jane Brown  
The Complaints Manager  
The Old Surgery  
2 The Street  
Anytown  
AT1 2CD

Date

Dear Jane Brown

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

I am writing to complain about the way I have been treated by Dr Jones at the Old Surgery.

I was seen by Dr Jones three times, on 26th April, 31st May and 13th December. 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 attitude upsetting as he did not seem to take me seriously. 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 8th January and arranged for tests. These showed that I was diabetic. I was prescribed medication and a special diet and I am now feeling much better. During the period from April 2008 to January 2009, however, I suffered with several infections, sleepless nights and I was very distressed.

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

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

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

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

- Dr Jones' attitude to patients to be reviewed
- Dr Jones to explain why he did not listen to me or examine me
- an apology from him 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 Allen until he retired. I was then moved to Dr Jones. I would like to regain confidence in the care provided by the practice.

I would like you to carry out a full investigation into my concerns in accordance with the NHS Complaints Regulations.

Yours sincerely

Mrs A Smith



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