

Complaints Policy

Purpose

This policy explains how patients and other service users can raise concerns or make a complaint about the services provided by this GP practice, and how the practice will handle, investigate, and respond to complaints in line with NHS regulations and guidance.

Scope

This policy applies to all complaints received by the practice, whether made by patients, their representatives, carers, or members of the public, relating to any aspect of care or service provided by the practice.

Policy Statement

We are committed to providing a high-quality, safe, and patient-centred service. We view complaints as an opportunity to learn, improve, and put things right where possible. Complaints will be handled sensitively, confidentially, and without discrimination. Making a complaint will not adversely affect a patient's care or treatment.

Legal and Regulatory Framework

This policy is aligned with the requirements of:

- The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009
- The NHS Constitution for England
- Care Quality Commission (CQC) Fundamental Standards (Regulation 16: Receiving and acting on complaints)
- Guidance from NHS England and the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)

Who Can Make a Complaint

A complaint may be made by:

- A patient receiving or who has received care or services from the practice
- Someone acting on behalf of a patient, with the patient's consent
- Someone who has been affected by the actions or decisions of the practice

Where a complaint is made on behalf of a patient, the practice will ensure appropriate consent and confidentiality requirements are met.

How to Make a Complaint

Complaints can be made:

- Verbally (in person or by telephone)
- In writing (letter or email)

Complaints should ideally be made within 12 months of the event or of becoming aware of the issue. Complaints made outside this timeframe may still be considered at the practice's discretion if there is a good reason for the delay.

Complaints should be addressed to:

Practice Manager

Informal Resolution

Where possible, concerns raised verbally will be dealt with promptly and informally by a member of staff or a clinician. If the concern cannot be resolved immediately, or if the complainant wishes to make a formal complaint, the matter will be handled under the formal complaint's procedure.

Formal Complaints Procedure

Acknowledgement

- All formal complaints will be acknowledged within **3 working days** of receipt.
- The acknowledgement will explain how the complaint will be handled and agree a response timescale with the complainant.

Investigation

- The complaint will be investigated thoroughly and fairly by an appropriate person who was not directly involved in the matter complained about, where possible.
- Relevant clinical records, statements, and other evidence will be reviewed.

Response

- A written response will be provided within the agreed timescale.
- The response will include:
 - A summary of the complaint
 - An explanation of how the complaint was investigated
 - The findings and conclusions
 - An apology where appropriate
 - Details of any actions taken or planned as a result of the complaint

Confidentiality, Records, and Evidence

Reviewed Dec 25

Next review Dec 27

Reviewed by: RS Practice Manager

All complaints will be handled confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation.

- Complaint records will be kept separate from clinical records
- Records will include the complaint, investigation notes, response, outcomes, and learning actions
- Complaints records will be retained in line with NHS Records Management Code of Practice
- Documentation will be available to demonstrate compliance with CQC Regulation 16

Learning, Governance, and Improvement

The practice recognises complaints as a key component of clinical governance and quality improvement.

The practice will:

- Record all complaints and concerns in a complaints log
- Analyse complaints for themes, risks, and learning points
- Discuss complaints and learning outcomes at practice meetings
- Share relevant learning with all staff, including clinicians and non-clinical staff
- Implement and document changes to improve safety, effectiveness, and patient experience
- Monitor the effectiveness of actions taken

Evidence of learning and improvement will be available for inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

Unresolved Complaints

If the complainant is not satisfied with the practice's response, they may speak to:

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)

- Complaints helpline: 0345 015 4033 (Mon-Thurs 8.30am – 5.00pm, Fridays 8.30am – 12pm)
- Fax: 0345 061 4000
- <https://www.ombudsman.org.uk/making-complaint> (for more information and to fill in a complaint form online)

Advocacy and Support

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Patients may seek independent support from the NHS Complaints Advocacy Service, which can help with making a complaint and understanding the process.

The NHS Complaints Advocacy for Suffolk (POhWER Suffolk Advocacy Service)

- email: nhscomplaints@pohwer.net
- Tel: 0300 456 2370 (Helpline Mon-Fri, 8am-6pm)
- Text: send the word 'pohwer' with your name and number to 81025
- Minicom: 0300 456 2364
- Write to: PO Box 17943, Birmingham, B9 9PB
- Website: <https://www.pohwer.net/suffolk-advocacy-service>

NHS England:

- You may also make your complaint directly to NHS England, who commission our service:
- By post: NHS England, PO Box 16738, Redditch, B97 9PT
- By telephone: 03003 11 22 33
- By email: england.contactus@nhs.net

Equality and Accessibility

The practice will make reasonable adjustments to ensure that patients are not disadvantaged when making a complaint. Information can be provided in alternative formats or languages on request.

Review of Policy

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years or sooner if there are changes to legislation, guidance, or practice arrangements.