

## **Complaints Procedure – A Guide for Complainants**

### **Our Commitment**

We want to give the best service to all our residents, patients and clients, and their relatives and carers. Usually we succeed – but sometimes things can go wrong. When this happens, we want to hear about it so we can put things right.

This leaflet tells you what to do if you are unhappy with the service we have provided to you, a relative, or someone in your care. You can also tell us if you are unhappy if we have not provided a service that you think we should have provided.

### **You can complain if you are:**

**Dissatisfied** with a service provided, either to yourself, your relative or someone in your care.

**Concerned** that you, your relative or someone in your care has not received a service you think should be provided.

*\*If you are making a complaint for someone else, you will need to get their written consent to do so.*

### **Access to records**

Please note, that to enable us to investigate your complaint, your personal information (e.g. relevant health or social care records) may need to be available to the person/s investigating your complaint.

If you have any concerns about this, please contact our Complaints Department staff.

## **How to Complain**

Tell the person you are dealing with that you are not satisfied so that, if possible, the problem can be sorted out straight away. If you cannot agree or find it hard to approach the person, ask to speak to their Manager.

If you still cannot agree or find it hard to approach the Manager, contact the Complaints Office. Complaints staff are appointed by the Trust and are here to help you. To contact the Complaints Office you can:

1. Write or email
2. Telephone
3. Call in person

Complaints Department  
South Eastern HSC Trust  
Lough House  
Ards Hospital  
Church Street  
Newtownards  
BT23 4AS

Telephone: (028) 9056 1427  
Email: [complaints@setrust.hscni.net](mailto:complaints@setrust.hscni.net)

## **Time Limits for making a complaint**

It is important to make your complaint as soon as possible. The time limits for making a complaint are:

- Within 6 months of the event, or
- Within six months of becoming aware that you have cause for complaint, provided this is not more than 12 months after the event.

*\*These limits can be extended if there are good reasons why you did not complain sooner.*

## **What happens then?**

Your complaint will be acknowledged within 2 working days of receipt and it will be investigated thoroughly and confidentially.

We aim to respond to your complaint in full within 20 working days, to address your concerns and let you know of any actions taken as a result. However, some complaints take longer to resolve than others. We will tell you if it becomes clear that we cannot respond within the timescales and we will explain why.

At any stage a meeting can be arranged to discuss your complaint when you may be accompanied by a relative, friend or someone from the Patient Client Council.

## **What to do if you are not happy with our response?**

We are committed to doing our best to resolve any complaint you may have. If having received our reply you are still not happy, please contact the Complaints Office within one month.

We will discuss the options available which may help to resolve any outstanding issues, and can explain how you can take your complaint further.

## **What if you are still not happy?**

If you remain dissatisfied, you can refer your complaint to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (the Ombudsman). The Ombudsman will consider your complaint to determine whether it needs investigation by him.

Although you have the right to approach the Ombudsman at any time, he will not usually take on a case which has not first been through the Complaints Procedure.

Further information on the services of the Ombudsman is available by contacting:

Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman  
Freepost NIPSO  
BELFAST

Freephone: 0800 343 424  
Text Phone: (028) 9089 7789  
Email: [nipso@nipso.org.uk](mailto:nipso@nipso.org.uk)  
Website: [www.nipso.org.uk](http://www.nipso.org.uk)

### **Useful contacts**

Throughout the complaint investigations you also have a right to seek the help of the **Patient and Client Council**.

The Patient & Client Council is an independent body, set up to represent your interests in health and social care. They can provide free and confidential advice, information and help throughout the complaints process, including help with writing letters, making phone calls or supporting you at meetings.

You can get more information about the Patient & Client Council at:  
FREEPOST  
Patient and Client Council

Freephone: 0800 917 0222  
Website: [www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net](http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net)  
Email: [info.pcc@pcc-ni.net](mailto:info.pcc@pcc-ni.net)

The **Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority** (RQIA) is the independent Health and Social Care regulatory body for Northern Ireland. Further information about services provided by RQIA is available at:

Telephone: (028) 9051 7500  
Website: [www.rqia.org.uk](http://www.rqia.org.uk)

### **Where can you find out more?**

More information on the HSC Complaints Procedure is also available on the Department of Health website: [www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)