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## Complaints, Concerns and Queries about our Services

### Introduction

Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust always tries to do its best for patients but we recognise that things may not always go according to your expectations. If you are unhappy with the treatment or service you have received you are entitled to make a complaint, and receive a full written response from the Trust Chief Executive. Your complaint will be treated confidentially and you will not be discriminated against as a result of making a complaint. The procedures described below explain how we deal with complaints.

### First Steps

You may wish to tell a member of staff or the person in charge of the department or ward that you are attending. Any of our staff will assist you with queries or problems that you might want help with. If they are unable to resolve the problem or answer your query they will seek help on your behalf from someone who can. There may be some problems or queries that you would like to have some help with, without necessarily making a formal complaint. A **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** has been established within the hospital to help people with queries that are not formal complaints and to provide advice about our services. The PALS service is not part of the complaints procedure itself but they might be able to help resolve your concerns informally or tell you more about the complaints procedure and independent complaints advocacy services. The PALS service can be contacted on **freephone telephone number 0800 9530667**. However, if you would prefer not to speak to the staff that are involved in your care and wish to make a formal complaint you can telephone or write to the Trust Complaints Manager, **telephone number 0191 4456047**. The information below tells you what to do if you want to complain.

## **Formal Complaints**

### **Who can complain?**

A complaint can be made by a patient or person affected or likely to be affected by the actions or decisions of the Trust. A complaint can also be made by someone acting on behalf of the patient or person, as long as they have the patient's consent. If you are making a complaint on behalf of a patient the Trust Complaints Manager will send a consent form by post that needs to be signed by the patient to confirm that they are happy for any information regarding their care, including that of a medical nature where necessary, to be disclosed to you. The Trust will be unable to reply to a person other than the patient until the signed consent form is returned.

### **What is the time limit for making a complaint?**

You should normally complain within 6 months of the event(s) concerned or within 6 months of becoming aware that you have something to complain about. The Trust does have some discretion to waive this time limit but only if there are good reasons as to why you could not complain earlier.

### **What the complaints procedure can do and what it can't do**

In answering your complaint we will apologise for any failings, give you a clear explanation of what happened and tell you what we will do to stop it happening again. However, the complaints procedure can't give you compensation or discipline staff. If you start legal proceedings about the matter you have complained about the complaints procedure will be stopped at that point because the matters will then need to be dealt with by the Trust's solicitors.

### **To whom should I complain initially?**

The first stage of the NHS complaints procedure is called 'Local Resolution'. Your complaint should be made in the first instance to the Trust. The contact address to send your complaint to is given at the end of this leaflet.

However, as described above, you can raise your concerns immediately by speaking to a member of staff (e.g. doctor, nurse, department manager etc) or the PALS service. They may be able to resolve your concerns without the need to make a more formal complaint. If you do

want to continue with your complaint you can do this verbally or by writing (including e-mail). If you make your complaint verbally a written record will be made by the Complaints Department or the member of staff that you give your complaint details to, and you will be asked to sign a copy of this, to agree that the details are correct.

### **What will happen once I have made my complaint?**

The Trust will send you an acknowledgement letter within 2 working days to confirm we have registered your complaint and that we have appointed an Investigating Officer to investigate your complaint. The acknowledgement letter will tell you who this person is and give you a contact telephone number for that person. The Investigating Officer will carry out an investigation and report their findings to the Complaints Department. You should then receive a reply from the Chief Executive within 5 weeks. We respond to over 90% of complaints within this timescale, but occasionally, if the staff we need to interview are on holiday or off duty etc, there may be a delay. If this happens we will let you know and keep you informed of progress.

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

Please contact the Complaints Manager or Investigating Officer (either by telephone or in writing) straight away explaining why you are not satisfied. We will look again at your concerns and may need to arrange a meeting with you to discuss your complaint further to try to resolve your outstanding issues.

### **What if I still remain dissatisfied? – Independent Review**

If you are still unhappy with the outcome of your complaint at the end of the local resolution stage you can ask the Healthcare Commission to review your complaint. The Healthcare Commission is an independent body established to promote improvements in healthcare. You will need to contact them within 6 months of receiving the final reply to your complaint from the Trust. You can contact the Commission at:

Healthcare Commission

Tel: 0845 601 3012

FREEPOST NAT 18958

Email: [complaints@healthcarecommission.org.uk](mailto:complaints@healthcarecommission.org.uk)

Complaints Investigation Team

Website: [www.healthcarecommission.org.uk](http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk)

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