

# Revised Complaints Process

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*Putting people first*

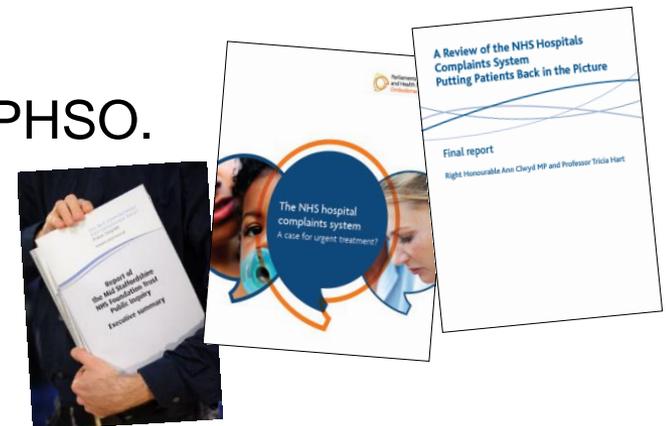
*Delivering excellent, accessible healthcare*



**An Associated University Hospital of  
Brighton and Sussex Medical School**

# Background

- In January 2016 the Complaints Team undertook a best practice review of the complaints management process within the Trust.
- This was in response to the output from the Complaints Feedback Survey report and known weaknesses in our system.
- The paperwork was inspired by changes made and implemented at United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust presented at a TDA National Conference in December.
- The paperwork was updated and the process initiated in February 2016.
- The format has been endorsed by CQC and PHSO.



# Complainants told us:

“complaint not dealt with within timescales. These timescales were not agreed they were imposed.”

“remove the element of pre-prepared excuses and the slant of presumed we are correct in your wording”

“more apologetic and less defensive”

“You need to live up to your logo of ‘putting people first’”

“Some of the responses in your letter were wrong”

“did you put into practice my suggestions? Did anything happen?”

The Trust ought not to be defensive about the care and services provided and did not get to the root cause of the problem of why proper care was not provided to me”

“by the time I received a response my shoulder was already healing and I was undergoing physio. It took so long I couldn’t be bothered to take the next steps.”

“3x extensions!!! A new timescale was advised not discussed or agreed... 3x extensions – lame reasons.”

# Example:

The last operation I had with Mr [redacted] in orthopaedics, The clinic letter noted that x-rays of the right ankle show one syndesmosis screw is broken.

I would be grateful if the following questions can be answered.

- Can you please explain why the syndesmosis screw is broken.
- Can you also tell me whether I will need further surgery to correct this and how long will be the recovery period.

Mr [redacted] reviewed you in clinic following the successful syndesmotic stabilisation. In the last few weeks prior to your clinic attendance, however, you had noticed increased swelling and stiffness in your ankle. The x-rays revealed a broken screw and Mr [redacted] informed you that it was likely that the screw was causing some of the symptoms. Mr [redacted] has advised that the syndesmosis screw can break in a number of cases but is not the cause for your symptoms. Screw breakage happens due to loading of the screws during the gait cycle.

Dear Sirs;

Thank you for letter dated 27 November .

- Can you please explain why the syndesmosis screw is broken.

Kind Regards

As stated in our letter of 27 November 2015, screw breakage can happen due to loading of the screws during the gait cycle. One's gait is the way one walks; the gait cycle starts when one foot makes contact with the ground and ends when that same foot contacts the ground again. That is to say screw breakage can occur due to competing pressures on the screw during motion, and this is a known factor and not an uncommon occurrence.

# Key issues identified:

- Complainants prefer to speak to someone and find it helpful.
- The wording of responses appears defensive.
- Majority of respondents felt that their questions were not answered, responses need to be focussed and comprehensive.
- Agreed timescales need to be met, if this is not possible they need to be renegotiated in agreement with the complainant, as per Trust policy.
- Complainants need to be kept up to date on the progress of their complaint.
- The Trust needs to improve the process of assuring the complainant that lessons have been learnt.

# Key changes:

## For Patients

- Simplified process
- Phone call from Complaints Manager to discuss complaint:
  - To assure the complainant that their complaint will be investigated
  - To agree the scope of the investigation, to ensure that the response will answer the complainants issues
  - To agree the format of the response – letter, e-mail, telephone call meeting
- Clear communication
- Tailored response

## For Staff

- Simplified process
- Clear accountability for addressing each point in the complaint
- Addresses the reported complexity of bringing the response into a narrative
- Format addresses the challenge of drawing out learning and actions
- Format makes transferring learning and actions to Datixweb straightforward
- Recording actions in Datixweb will give the Divisions and the Trust a clear record of learning and improvements made to patient experience

# Response template:

## Complaint response

Complaint details				
Complainant name		Datix ref		Patient Experience Lead
Patient name				

The following members of staff contributed to this investigation:			
Name		Role	

No	Issues, questions and concerns	Investigation findings	Learning / actions
1	Ensures a clear, open and transparent approach to ensure that all points are addressed and are factual against each concern.	Forces a response to each point (which our reopened complaints indicates is a weakness), doesn't require creative writing skills to incorporate the findings into a narrative. When sent to staff the points they are responsible for will be highlighted.	Guarantees ownership of each issue and associated remedial action or learning.
2	Complainants can see that every point has been considered and that there is clear alignment of learning against issues raised.		The learning column can be transferred directly into Datixweb and a running action plan created for Divisions and services to track learning and progress.
3		This is sent to complainant along with their "cover" letter; they can see that every point has been considered and that there is clear alignment of learning against the issues raised.	
4			
5			

Trust Headquarters  
East Surrey Hospital  
Canada Avenue  
Redhill  
RH1 5RH

Date 16<sup>th</sup> December 2015

Mrs XXXXXX  
Address line 1  
Address line 2  
Town  
Surrey  
XX1 1XX

Choice of  
introductory  
paragraphs

*A choice of*

*paragraphs / wording is prepared here for you, delete red text once you have chosen which you will use. You may need / wish to make minor edits but the main wording must remain.*

**Paragraph 1: Introduction**

Thank you for your letter of XXXX, I am sorry that you have had cause to complain; I appreciate that you will not have done so lightly and I would like to thank you for bringing your concerns to my attention.

or

**Paragraph 2: Introduction**

I would first like to say that I am extremely sorry that the care (you/your relative) received whilst raising these concerns, I know you are extremely valuable to us.

*MP's: When an MP writes on behalf of a patient, they then forward on to the complainant.*

Thank you for your letter of XXXX, I am very sorry that you have had cause to complain, I appreciate he/she will not have done so lightly and I would like to thank you for bringing their concerns to my attention. The subsequent paragraphs need to be then written to the MP and not to the complainant.

**Paragraph 2: Investigation process**

I asked (investigator name and role) to investigate this issues you raised and (he/she) has now reported back to me. You will find attached to this letter a response to each of the issues and questions you asked and also where actions have been taken already or are planned. I hope that you can see that your concerns have been taken seriously and that staff have listened and learned as a result.

Or

**Paragraph 2: Investigation process**

Our process for investigating complaints begins with a case manager being identified who can pull together the investigation and replies from staff. Your case manager was (name and

Choice of  
process  
paragraphs

role) and has now reported back to me. Attached to this letter is a grid where each of the issues and concerns you raised have been detailed and a response from staff entered against each, a template we have recently introduced to ensure that we pick up on all of your concerns. The final column indicates where learning has been put into actions undertaken.

**Paragraph 3: Summary of our response**

Whilst the investigation findings are detailed on the attachment, I would like to highlight

- ~~congratulate~~ response to main question/complaint posed by you. We are sorry that your father's personal hygiene needs should have been dealt with more promptly. We are sorry that we have not provided the level of care expected.
- note any subsidiary issues
- ~~make~~ another relevant point partly in our defence [also note that the department was extremely busy that is not an excuse and that the dignity of our patients is respected].

*Taking the main issues draw these into a paragraph*

*Example phrases you can include:*

- *I am extremely sorry*
- *We clearly let you down*
- *I would like to reassure you*
- *You deserved better, a lot better from us and we let you down*
- *We are sorry*
- *It is hard to express how truly sorry we are*
- *What should have happened is....*

**Paragraph 4: Learning**

Genuinely listening to our patients experiences of care is extremely important to us and learning from where we could have done better is a corner stone to our journey of continuous improvement. Whilst our staff have identified on the template where changes could be made or lessons shared, what is important is that these changes make a difference and if you have any additional thoughts on how we could make that difference we would of course be very pleased to hear them.

Or

**Paragraph 4: Learning**

Making a difference and improving our services and care is a key objective every day for our staff and the organisation as a whole and we want to be sure that the actions and changes made as a result of your concerns do just that – make a difference. We will be keeping track on the actions and reviewing progress and if you have any further suggestions or thoughts on what else you feel we could or should do then please do not hesitate to contact us.

**Paragraph 5: Closing**

I hope that you can see that we have taken your concerns seriously and that we can investigate and answer them, as an organisation we are open and transparent. I would like to once again apologise and thank you for your assurance that we have taken your concerns

Only  
paragraph  
that needs  
creative  
writing;  
example  
words –  
drawing a  
judgement

Choice of  
learning  
process  
paragraphs

# So far.....

- The phone call from the Complaints Manager is appreciated.
  - She is able to explain normal protocols and answer some generic questions (e.g. explain the cause of cancelled procedures) and offer that initial apology for their experience, which is valued.
  - It's an opportunity to identify any immediate issues to be resolved.
- Six complaints have been resolved at the telephone call stage.
- There appear to be fewer re-opened complaints but it is still early in the process.
- More work is needed on providing reassurance about lessons learnt from complaints.
- Staff have reported that they appreciate the focus of the template.