

Complaints Policy

Document Owner:	Pauline Ironside and designated Partner within each Practice
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Application:	ALL STAFF
Purpose:	This Policy is to ensure the proper handling of any complaint about the organisation, care which a patient has received from Valens Medical Partnership or an individual member of staff. This policy meets Local and National criteria.

Important Note:

The Intranet version of this document is the only version that is maintained.

Any printed copies should therefore be viewed as “*uncontrolled*” and, as such, may not necessarily contain the latest updates and amendments

1. Definition

A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction that requires response. Patients may not always use the word 'complaint'. They may offer a comment or suggestion which can be extremely helpful, but it is important to recognise those 'comments' which are really complaints and need to be handled as such.

2. Importance of having a complaints procedure

In spite of the efforts of all staff it is likely that a complaint will be made by a patient at some point. To reduce the anxiety and apprehension for both patients and staff it is crucial to have a procedure for handling complaints.

3. Aims

The aims of this Policy:

- To resolve most complaints at Practice level.
- To provide opportunities for improving services.
- To manage complaints about any aspect of the service provided by anyone working for Valens Medical Partnership.
- To be part of the 'local resolution' mechanisms for settling complaints in the NHS.

4. Scope

The scope of this Policy is that it covers complaints about any aspect of the service provided by anyone working in Valen Medical Partnership.

A complaint may be made direct to the Practice or to NHS England.

This Procedure relates to all staff working at the Practice, whether employed by Valens Medical Partnership or attached from an NHS Trust or other provider. Although Trusts may wish to deal with complaints about their staff or procedures, Trust staff must also notify Valens Medical Partnership of any complaint relating to services delivered at a Practice or in the patient's home.

Complaints about GP's providing services not included in general medical services, ie working in hospitals, are not dealt with by this practice based procedure. These complaints are dealt with through the Procedure of the Trust or Authority with whom the GP has a contract for the service provided.

5. Nationally agreed criteria

This Practice based complaints procedure complies with the following nationally agreed criteria.

The Procedure will be managed entirely by the Practice with NHS England becoming involved only if the person complaining asks them to assist in handling a complaint. A summary of the Procedure will be circulated to all staff and thereafter given to new staff. Everyone working in the Practice has a responsibility to understand how the Procedure works and to have a sense of ownership of the Procedure.

One person is nominated to administer the Policy. The Patient Services Team Leaders and Patient Engagement Officer are the first point of contact. The Business Lead for Patient Services is responsible for management of complaints and overall responsibility sits with the designated Partner within the Practice, who is the Practice Chairperson or, in his/her absence, another partner. The Procedure is published and written information is made available to anyone who asks for it.

6. Responsibilities

Everybody working in the Practice must understand how this policy works and that the resolution of a complaint at Practice level is in everybody's best interest.

Those who are responsible for the handling of complaints are listed on number 10 of this document.

8. Procedure

(i) Recording of complaints

Complaints can be made by patients, former patients, someone who is affected, or likely to be affected, by the action, omission or decision of individuals working at the practice, or by a representative of a patient who is capable of making the complaint themselves.

When a complaint is made on behalf of a child, there must be reasonable grounds for the complaint being made by the representative rather than the child and the complaint must be being made in the best interests of the child. If this is not the case, then written notification of the decision not to investigate the complaint must be sent to the representative.

We keep strictly to the rules of medical confidentiality. If the person complaining on behalf of someone else we must have the patient's permission to do so. An authority signed by the person concerned will be needed, unless they are incapable (because of illness or infirmity) of providing this. A Third Party Consent Form is provided below.

A record must be kept of:

- each complaint received;
- the subject matter of the complaint;
- the steps and decisions taken during an investigation;
- the outcome of each investigation;
- when the practice informed the complainant of the response period and any amendment to that period
- whether a report of the outcome of the investigation was sent to the complainant within the response period or any amended period.

Records of complaints handling are for practice use only. NHS England may ask for information if they are asked to investigate a complaint but they will not call in the Practice's own record of complaints handling.

The Patient Engagement Officer will ensure all details are accurately recorded and that documentation in relation to complaints is kept up to date.

Complaints may be received in writing or orally. Where a patient is unable to communicate a complaint by either means on their own then arrangements will be made to facilitate the giving of the complaint. Complaints can be made up to 12 months after the incident that gave rise to the complaint, or from when the complainant was made aware of it. Beyond this timescale it is at the discretion of the practice as to whether to investigate the matter.

(ii) Initial Contact

What to do when a patient complains in person at your practice

If a patient asks to make a complaint whilst at the practice, we need to be as helpful as we can and ensure it is handled effectively. Sometimes a complaint can be easily resolved just by listening to what the patient has to say, and providing assistance there and then. The Patient Services Team Leaders at each site and the Patient Services Coordinator can all provide initial support to staff to help resolve any informal complaints, and often the complaint won't escalate beyond this initial stage.

However, the patient may wish to put their complaint in writing. If they do, a complaint form is available at reception and can be handed to the patient for completion. Some patients prefer to make their complaint in writing so that they can put all their points across, so this option should always be available.

If the patient asks to speak to the Practice Manager or Senior Manager

The patient may ask to speak to the Practice Manager or a Senior Manager at the practice as they want their complaint to be dealt with more formally but still as a verbal complaint. Sometimes this situation can be challenging to manage at reception.

- If this request is made at one of our main sites and the patient insists on speaking to the Practice Manager then please make contact with one of the Business Leads who is on site as one of them are normally working at Brockwell, Lintonville or Morpeth.
- The Business Lead will then come and speak to the patient, ideally away from the main reception area. The outcome of this discussion will then be passed on to me and the Patient Engagement Officer for any further action or investigation.
- Other managers and coordinators within the practice may also be available for support for example; Natalie Martin Michelle Hankinson, Sue Glennie, Amy Bains, Coral Garrick, Angela Reed. Please don't hesitate to ask for the support you need at the time.
- If the patient has asked to speak to the Practice Manager but a Business Lead, Manager or Coordinator isn't based at your site (and this would normally be the case in our smaller branches), please explain this to the patient, and offer them a call back from the Business Lead for Patient Services, and send me their details if the patient is happy with this.

Business Lead for Patient Services Direct Dial

- Brockwell: 01670 333794
- Lintonville: 01670 844317

These numbers are for internal use, not for giving out to patients please.

You can then email Pauline the details and who will respond as quickly as she can.

When she is on annual leave, she will arrange for one of the other Business Leads to provide this support.

What to do if a Business Lead or other Manager/Coordinator isn't available

If the situation escalates quickly at reception; for example, the patient is pressing for someone in senior management to speak to them urgently, you can't get hold of a Business Lead at your practice, there isn't another manager or coordinator available, the patient won't accept a call back and so on...then please stay calm and ask a Partner for assistance in dealing with the situation, as patients can sometimes become agitated or aggressive and it's important we have an early intervention to help diffuse the situation as best we can.

What to do when a patient complains on the phone

We have a process in place for verbal complaints, which in the first instance can be passed on to the Team Leader who will speak to the patient and try to resolve the complaint, or the email form can be sent to Natalie (or Pauline in her absence) for a call back. Where possible we try to call the patient back the same day, but it can be the next day, depending on when it's received.

What to do when a patient hands in a complaints form

If however, the complaint is not resolved an investigation will be carried out and the patient is asked to write down their complaint. (If needed the Patient Services Team Leader can help write down the complaint on their behalf verbatim). The written complaint is passed to the Patient Engagement Officer and recorded in the register.

When a patient rings in to make a complaint the Patient Services Officer or Team Leader will allow the patient to air their complaint and if possible resolve the matter to the patient's satisfaction. All members of the Primary Health Care Team involved in the complaint will be informed of the complaint and the outcome.

The Patient Services Officer or Team Leader makes a detailed note of what the complainant had to say. This should be done at the time or very soon afterwards on a standard problem report form.

The Patient Services Officer or Team Leader should listen carefully and understand the complainant perspective as far as possible, establishing the facts and ensuring an understanding of what is being complained about.

Explanations are not offered until the problem has been looked into, unless the problem can be resolved immediately. If this cannot be resolved then the complaint should then be escalated to the Patient Services Coordinator for further investigation. At all stages the Patient Engagement Officer should be informed so that they can keep an accurate log of all activity.

The complaint will be formally acknowledged by the Patient Engagement Officer within 3 working days, this may be done by telephone or letter. If we need to conduct an investigation of the complaint we endeavour to respond in writing within 28 working days. If the complainant after receiving our reply feels a meeting would be helpful they must contact the the Patient Engagement Officer who can arrange this with the Patient Services Coordinator or Business Lead.

9. Investigation of complaint

When a Written complaint is received the Valens complaints procedure should be followed and the Patient Engagement Officer should inform the Business Lead and designated Partner in the practice regarding the complaint.

If the complaint is of a non-clinical nature the Patient Engagement Officer will liaise with the Patient Services Coordinator and Business Lead who will review the complaint and draft a response.

If the complaint is of a clinical nature the Patient Engagement Officer should send acknowledgement and seek advice and guidance from the Designated Partner. The clinical record should be reviewed to look at the merit of the complaint based on the Designated Partner's clinical judgement. The Patient Engagement Officer will draft the response and the Designated Partner will advise of any clinical guidelines, protocols or policies to refer to etc.

Where appropriate advice should be sought from the Medical defence organisation (MDDUS).

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The Patient Engagement Officer should follow the NHS England suggested guide for preparing a draft response namely:

- Firstly thank the complainant for taking the time to raise their concerns.
- Clearly state what information you have relied upon in order to investigate the concerns raised. This should include the names of staff who have provided statements, (verbally or in writing), documentation used i.e. medical records, policies / procedures, protocols, national guidance, legislation applicable at the time of the incident – sources of evidence that will need to be tested against i.e. a code of conduct, best practice.
- It is beneficial and constructive to set out a statement or summary of the points that you conclude are well founded early on. This allows your attention and resources to be focused on the points of disagreement and the reasons why you have not upheld them.
- Highlight each concern in turn and then respond to the issues raised. You should begin by stating whether the concern was well founded or not and the rationale behind your decision together with references to the evidence used to determine this.
- Where an issue is well founded, provide an appropriate apology and confirm the action taken to prevent a recurrence, ensuring that the actions are appropriate and proportionate – detail the timeframe to implement the actions to be taken.
- In order to support the staff, conclude by summarising your findings, particularly where things did go well.
- In order to facilitate analysis, please include all lessons learned as a consequence of the complaint investigation
- Ensure that 'next step' information is provided i.e. PHSO contact details.
- Finally, once again thank the person making the complaint for taking the time to raise their concerns and providing you with an opportunity to address them. Where appropriate, confirm that should they require clarification of any issues, that they can discuss this further with you by phone or in person. In the case of bereavement; it is good practice to offer a meeting to discuss the matter further if required.

The Partner and Business Lead will review the draft response and amend as appropriate.

Clinicians named in the complaint are also given the final draft response for final comment/approval.

10. Using complaints to improve our service

Consideration will be made of how Valens Medical Partnership can make the most positive use of complaints. Valens will ensure that learning points are shared within each Practice. Regular calibration between practices will be encouraged to ensure impartial review of certain complex cases.

11. Person Responsible for handling complaints

Responsible Person. The Responsible Person is a partner responsible for the supervision of the complaints procedure and for making sure that action is taken in light of the outcome of any investigation. They will be supported by the Business Lead for Patient Services. Partner for each practice - Dr Jacinta Manship at Wellway, Dr Lindsay Gilfillan at Lintonville and Dr Adrian Jefferies at Brockwell.

Business Lead – The Business Lead for Patient Services is the senior manager within Valens who has responsibility for ensuring we perform to high standards of patient satisfaction, through providing quality customer service. The Business Lead will be responsible for responding to formal, written complaints of a non-clinical nature.

Patient Engagement Officer. The Patient Engagement Officer is responsible for the investigation of complaint and collating responses. In the absence of the Patient Engagement Officer the person responsible would be the Business Lead for Patient Services. They will notify the Responsible Person of any concerns about a complaint leading to non-compliance. This person will identify ways for the practice to return to compliance.

Patient Services Coordinator and Team Leaders Team Leaders are responsible for resolving informal, verbal patient complaints in their own practices on a day to day basis. If they are unable to resolve the matter with the patient concerned, they will escalate to the Patient Services Coordinator for further advice and support. The Patient Services Coordinator is responsible for resolving all verbal feedback and complaints and will liaise with the Patient Engagement Officer to ensure actions are logged and any written follow up is produced.

11. Team Support

The Patient Services Coordinator and Business Leads will support any member of the team who is complained about. This member of the team will be made aware of the complaint as early as appropriate and support will continue during the investigation and resolution of the complaint, and afterwards. Members of staff involved in complaints should discuss with the Patient Services Coordinator or Business Lead any of their concerns or worries during this time.

12. Confidentiality

Patients will be assured that personal information about them will not be shared with anyone outside the Practice unless they give express permission for this to happen. Details of a complaint against a team member will only be made available to those who need to know.

13. Publicity

The practice's arrangements for dealing with complaints and how further information about these arrangements should be made available to patients. It is the responsibility of the Patient Engagement Officer to ensure this is publicised.

How to contact independent advocacy services and the right of patients to approach the Ombudsman is also to be publicised. This information is available on each practice website.

14. Unreasonable complainants

When faced by an unreasonable complainant, staff will take action in accordance with page 34 of the DH's *Listening, responding, improving: a guide to better customer care* guidance.

15. Seeking further advice

The Practice attempts to resolve all concerns however if the complainant remains unhappy there are several organisations who they can contact. The information below can be given to the patient:-

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Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) provide confidential advice and support to help sort out any concerns that you may have about any issues you may have about your NHS care. They can be contacted at:

PALS Freephone 0800 032 0202
Text 01670 511098
Email Northoftynepals@northumbria.nhs.uk

Or write to Freepost; RLTC-SGHH-EGXJ
North of Tyne PALS,
The Old Stables, Grey's Yard, Morpeth.
NE61 1QD

In the event that you decide to make a formal complaint, the PALS service cannot assist you with this. If you wish to make a formal complaint you may do so by contacting the Patient Services Coordinator, or, if you do not feel comfortable dealing direct with the practice you can contact the commissioner of the services. NHS England is the commissioner of primary care services (such as GP and dental practices) and, if you prefer, you can send your complaint about these services to **NHS England** at the address below:

Tel: 0300 311 22 33
Email: england.contactus@nhs.net
In writing: NHS England, PO Box 16738, Redditch, B97 9PT

We aim to ensure that all complaints are handled well and that appropriate action is taken to resolve a concern. We will do everything that we feel is appropriate in order to try and resolve matters to your satisfaction.

If, however, you remain unhappy after your complaint has been addressed, you can ask the **Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO)** to review your complaint. You should do this within twelve months from the date on which the subject matter of the complaint occurred.

The PHSO can be contacted by telephone, email or in writing as detailed below:

Helpline : 0345 015 4033
Send at text to their 'call back' service: 07624 813 005, with your name and mobile number
Email: phso.enquiries@ombudsman.org.uk
In writing: Ombudsman at Millbank Tower, Millbank, London,
SW1P 4QP

Further information about the Ombudsman is also available on their website www.ombudsman.org.uk

Healthwatch Northumberland

Adapt North East

Burn Lane

Hexham

NE46 3HN

Tel: 03332 408 468

Text: 07413 385 275

Website: www.healthwatchnorthumberland.co.uk

Email: info@healthwatchnorthumberland.co.uk

Statement of complaint form

Patient		Person Making Complaint	
Name:		Name:	
Address:		Address:	
Telephone No:		Telephone No:	
Ethnicity of Patient:			
Gender:			
Any relevant disabilities or religious beliefs			
Date of Birth:			
NATURE OF COMPLAINT:			
Surgery Site		Department	
Date of Incident if known		Name of staff involved (if known)	

Signed Dated

Summary of complaint:- *(please continue on a separate sheet if required)*

Completed forms to be returned to:
Patient Engagement Officer

PATIENT AUTHORISATION FORM

Section A – Patient detail

Surname		Forename(s)	
Address			
		Postcode	
Date of Birth		GP	
GP Address			
		Postcode	

Section B – Authorisation (to be completed as appropriate)

To be completed by the person named in Section A and the nominated person acting on that person's behalf.

I, _____ certify that I am the person named in Section A. I hereby give consent for _____ (Name of nominated person) to make a complaint on my behalf. I understand that this will involve information from my health records being disclosed.

Signed: Date:

For the nominated person

I (insert name in BLOCK capitals) _____
Have consent from the person detailed in Section A to act on their behalf.

Signed: date:

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To be completed by person's next of kin/personal representative/executor

I (insert name in BLOCK capitals) _____ confirm that I am making a complaint on behalf of the person named in Section A, because:

- The person is under the age of 16;
- I am the next of kin/representative/executor of the deceased person named in Section A.*
- I have relevant nominated Power of Attorney for the person in Section A.*

(please tick as appropriate)

Signed: date:

* please supply copy Grant of Representation (as issued by the Probate Registry) or power of attorney as appropriate

Please complete and return this form to:

Patient Engagement Officer