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**Complaint Themes and Advocacy Reflections 2020-21**

# **Learning from complaints**

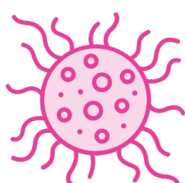
# Forward

## Thinking about making a complaint?

Find out more about what's involved in making a complaint about NHS or adult social care services and what your next steps might be.

Healthwatch West Sussex runs the West Sussex Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service.

NHS Complaints Advocacy is guaranteed under legislation, as a free, independent and confidential service to all people in England who need support to get their complaint resolved. It helps you know all your options, your rights and how to make sure your voice is heard.



Over the year complaint handling has changed, with investigations and follow-up actions often having to be suspended because staff were redeployed to respond to the pandemic. In the early stages of lockdown, our Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service team proactively reviewed our service information and processes. We looked at our resources against the draft complaints framework, created by NHS England, so our documents were ready and aligned to a new way of working.

Towards the end of the year, we saw increasing demand for health complaints advocacy at a rate which is ongoing and is forecast to exceed our resources. We are looking at this closely and will be talking to commissioners early, to make sure people are able to access support to have their voice heard and complaints addressed as this often also results in valuable learning for the NHS and other system leaders.



### Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.

**[www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)**

**0300 012 0122**

**[helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](mailto:helpdesk@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)**

# Highlights

1


Added to our self-help **information** to reflect changes to local resolution meetings which have moved to being held virtually.

2

Both complexity and number of cases has increased significantly. Cases often involve multiple agencies, safeguarding or serious incidents.

3


Valuable Lessons: For example, our support meant a resident's mental health care complaint resulted in six recommendations to improve local services.




*'Thank you so much. It's nice to be able to let go now and I think I've only been able to do that because of the help and support from you .... I think my main comments about this service would be that right from the start you made it so much easier to navigate, and despite barely having had the chance to read up on my case before the hospital meeting, your professionalism and support was amazing, and I'd have been totally lost without you there. The guidance you've been able to give throughout the hospital complaint and then the ombudsman process, and finally to have my records amended has been invaluable.'*

Advocacy Client, March 2021

Providing support





180 referred cases

Referrals dropped off at the start of the year as the pandemic took hold, returning to a more familiar rate over the next few months before rising dramatically in the final quarter.

We believe this reflects where people were in their thoughts and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

234 people supported to amplify their voice

Our two qualified advocates, Katie and Ben, continued to provide valuable information, and practical and emotional support to individuals and their families, during the pandemic. This has helped people to consider their options, and where possible to resolve concerns without formalising a complaint, where necessary for others to have their voice and concerns heard and enable lessons to be learned.

# Supporting NHS learning

Before the pandemic, commissioners recognised the need for a Clinical Harm Review to look into emerging concerns about an *Any Qualified Provider* contract for Non-Obstetric Ultrasounds, where potential harm to people had taken place. We agreed to be part of the panel overseeing the review which has continued during the pandemic, to support the NHS in better understanding things from a patient's viewpoint. The learning from this work is even more relevant as the NHS recovers from the impact of the pandemic.

Whilst it is sad that it has been necessary to complete a Clinical Harm Review, the review panel which included a representative from Healthwatch West Sussex have strived to work with compassion, care and consideration through the whole process.

The outcomes and learning from this Review can be found by visiting the Clinical Commissioning Group's website: <https://www.westsussexccg.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2021/06/BestCare-Clinical-Harm-Review-Outcome-Report.pdf>

The review panel are putting forward a recommendation to NHS England that any revision to the existing publication of the External Clinical Harm Review Handbook reinforces the benefits of having an independent patient perspective representative at every panel meeting, together with provision of remuneration, for example to Healthwatch.

The Review author has written that *'Healthwatch West Sussex provided considerable resources and time to support the review, to evidence the need for such input where patient safety and harm is being explored and where people need a voice in the process. This support was delivered without additional funding and it is acknowledged that if future requests were made to Healthwatch organisations consideration of funding might be required dependent upon the time commitment expected.'*



**'Healthwatch's participation in this review gave a powerful perspective when looking at how to identify people at risk because of issues with a provider. We added value by raising non-clinical considerations, through our in-depth knowledge of supporting people to have their voice heard and to help the NHS learn lessons.'**

Katie, Senior Independent Health Complaints Advocate for Healthwatch West Sussex

# Building confidence

Advocacy is taking action to support people to say what they want, secure their rights, pursue their interests and obtain services or outcomes they need. We do this by working in partnership with the people we support and take their side, promoting social inclusion, equality and social justice within the scope of health needs and provision by the NHS.

## Getting communication right

Our advocate supported Matt by understanding his communication needs, taking the time to craft his complaints letter by sending text messages initially, as this was the only way he felt able to articulate his concerns. By building trust this way, and not rushing Matt he was able to take part in a Local Resolution Meeting. Now his GP practice is aware of his communication style, they are sending him messages rather than calling, and because of this, it was not necessary to take his concerns further.



“*My Healthwatch case worker has been a fantastic resource advising me on self-advocacy.*

”

## Supporting self-advocacy

My client had bounced around various medical providers for over a year and had been discharged from an acute hospital during COVID-19 (2020). They felt let down by the system and their partner told us how they watched, as the whole thing just sucked the life out of their partner.

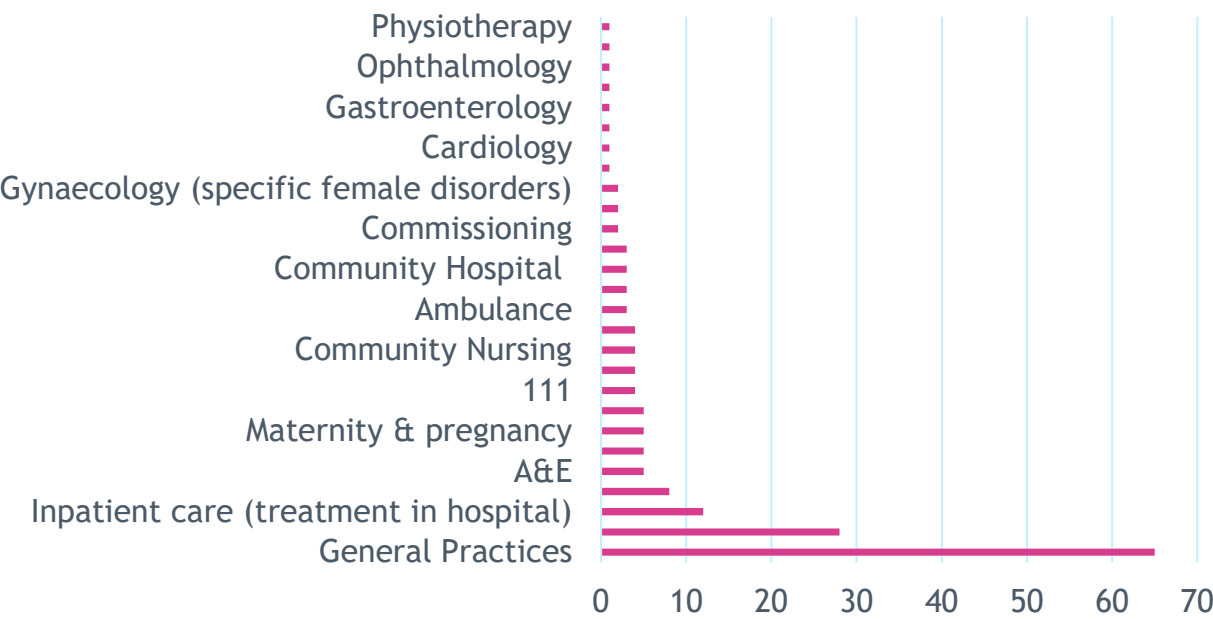
Over two months, as their advocate, I've been able to suggest various organisations they could make contact with and ideas for working with their GP to get access to the crisis team. I've provided information about making an NHS complaint.

When they were readmitted to hospital in great pain, I contacted Patient Liaison Service (PALS) and took external advice on how to deal with the situation. As a result of sharing this information and advice, the person's partner was able to talk to the Ward Manager and it was agreed the consultant would make direct contact and discuss the situation as the person was unable to walk, in pain but was classed as medically-fit to be discharged. After communicating with various parties, it was agreed to monitor the situation for 48-hours before discharge which gave the client the reassurance and support needed.

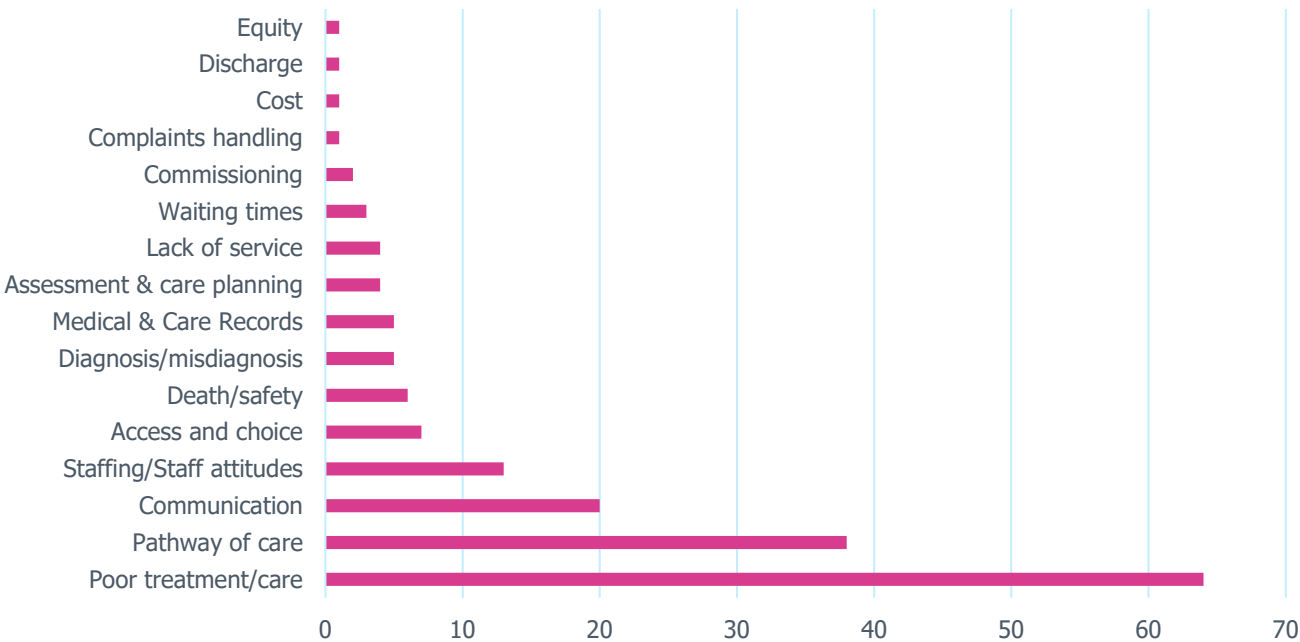


# What people are complaining about?

## By service type



## By concern



## Learning outcomes

The nature of advocacy means we do not always know the outcome of the complaint. The following are an example of the learning outcomes from complaints where our advocates have been able to capture this information.

- An internal investigation report, by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust resulted in six recommendations to improve services for patients.
- Provided feedback to the Parliamentary Ombudsman about their newly implemented process of changing peoples' names in the investigation report, which was negatively received by a client, and left them feeling the report was about someone else. Subsequently, the Ombudsman has now changed back to the reports have the person's real name, which will then be changed for publication.
- Supported a family (with children under child protection) following an unsafe data disclosure by a Trust. The Trust has created a poster called STOP & THINK SAFEGUARDING, to provide information to all staff about the potential consequences of sharing addresses. Their safeguarding training has been amended to highlight the importance of all staff being vigilant and considering the implications for a child when there is or has been a child protection plan held within their records.
- People do not always get the outcome from raising concerns that they had hoped for. However, our advocates make sure they understand what their clients want as outcomes and support them to include these in their NHS complaint. We know this works well for people as they tell us so, for example: *thank you for writing the complaint letter up the way you have and being so understanding.*
- A resident was supported over a long period of time, after having an MRI arthrogram in their hip, within 24 hours they were in hospital with sepsis. The complaint process was complicated and took a great deal of time to find a resolution. The client shared *I would like to thank you for all the very hard work you put in my [name give] hospital complaint, .... To put forward the difficult experience which I went through with my septic arthritis and treatment... Your understanding of all stages of my case and your professional approach was 100%. I am very grateful to you for everything.*

Our approach of addressing concerns before they escalate to full complaints **has a cost saving to the NHS**, as does better future patient outcomes and time and resource savings from lessons learned.



### Share your concerns with us

If you have a concern about a NHS service, or need help with making a complaint, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.

**Website:** [www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)

**Telephone:** 0300 012 0122

**Email:** [IHCAS@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](mailto:IHCAS@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)

# Contact us

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