

Making the most of a local resolution meeting

A Local Resolution meeting is an important tool in the NHS Complaints process.

It is intended as an opportunity to discuss and resolve concerns in a face to face environment, which can avoid the difficulties of trying to put often complex matters in writing.

In order to get the most out of a Local Resolution Meeting Healthwatch West Sussex has put this guide together, as in its experience there are a number of things that an NHS organisation and a complainant can do to increase the chances of successfully resolving a complaint at a meeting.

An NHS Complaints Advocate can help with each of the steps below.

Before the Meeting

An agenda

As it is important that the right staff attend the meeting and that the NHS organisation and complainant know what will be discussed, it is useful to have an agreed agenda for the meeting. This is often supplied by the complainant although it does not have to be. An agenda will also help keep a meeting on track and increases the chance that all areas of concern will be discussed.

Supporting the complainant

This type of meeting can be a daunting prospect for a complainant, and it is therefore good practice for the complainant to be provided with the details of their local complaint's advocacy service, if they have not already had them. An advocate will often be able to attend the meeting to support the complainant.

The NHS organisation should also make clear whether or not they are happy for the complainant to bring a friend or family member with them as well.

Recording the meeting

Having accurate records is good practice for any NHS organisation as there may be occasions where one party may need to rely or reflect on something that was said at the meeting. Therefore, before a Local Resolution Meeting the NHS organisation involved should agree with the complainant how the meeting is going to be recorded, whether this be written minutes and / or an audio recording.

Agreeing the length of the meeting

So that both sides can get the best from a meeting it is important to know how long the meeting will last. It can set a poor tone for the meeting if both sides have different expectations of how long it will last.

At the Meeting

Explaining the process

Many complainants will not have been to a Local Resolution Meeting before so it is important that the NHS organisation explain to them how the meeting will run i.e. who will be chairing the meeting, when questions can be asked, how the agenda points will be covered.

USE OF CLEAR LANGUAGE.

The NHS organisation should remember that the Complainant is not necessarily versed in medical terms and should therefore refrain from excessive use of medical terminology, as this can be baffling for the complainant and will often leave them unsatisfied.

Access to medical notes

If possible, the complainant's medical notes should be present at the meeting. As there may well be disagreements as to what may or may not have happened at a particular time, referring to the notes can be useful in achieving a satisfactory resolution.

Without evidence in the form of notes to back up a statement made by the NHS organisation the complainant may well feel that it is a case of 'well they would say that'.

After the Meeting

What happens next

At the end of the meeting there should be agreement on what happens next. This can include explaining how long the minutes / records of the meeting will take to send to the complainant. If any further investigations are required as a result of the meeting the complainant should be informed of when they might expect a response to these.

The NHS organisation should also make clear if they are happy to respond to any further concerns that the complainant might have or has the local resolution process finished and if the complainant still has any outstanding matters to approach the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman.