

Complaints Handling in Health and Social Care

The Complaints Department of the HSCB would like to remind all Family Practitioner Services of their responsibilities, and good practice guidelines in terms of complaints handling arrangements.

All family practices are required to have a designated complaints officer and a Practice-based complaints procedure, which is in accord with “Guidance in relation to the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure” (April 2019). Complaints can very often be resolved quickly and ‘on the spot’ and all efforts should be made to make this happen. However, for more complex complaints or those received in writing (letter, complaint form, statements of complaint) more formal arrangements are required.

Timescales

These complaints should be acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt and responded to in full within 10 working days. If this timescale will not be met, the complainant should be given an explanation for the delay, an apology and a revised timescale.

Acknowledgement Letters

Your Practice Complaints Leaflet should be enclosed with the letter of acknowledgement to ensure the complainant is aware of the role, availability and contact details of the Patient and Client Council (PCC), the HSCB and if they remain dissatisfied with the response, that they retain the right to approach the NI Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO).

Within the acknowledgement you should make reference to the PCC and of it being an independent organisation, which acts as an advocate for patients, and can provide help and assistance throughout the complaints process.

Responses to Complaints

These should address all of the points of the complaint, offer apologies where necessary always inform of any learning or changes in procedure/protocol that have occurred as a result of the complaint. They should also give the complainant opportunity to come back to the Practice if they remain dissatisfied and advise them of their right to approach the NIPSO and of the time limit within which to do so.

The HSCB can act as an honest broker or intermediary in complaints relating to family practices. It can become involved at any stage and be at the request of the complainant and/or Practice. However, both parties need to be in agreement to the involvement.

In instances where resolution is proving difficult, Practices may wish to advise complainants of their ability to approach the Board and/or offer that the HSCB become involved.

Important

We have a dedicated Complaints Hotline number which is **(028) 95 363893**. Please ensure this information is reflected within all of your complaints literature.

All HSCB Complaints Staff are based in HSCB Headquarters, 12 – 22 Linenhall Street, Belfast. Therefore, any formal complaints received and investigated by the Practice, should be anonymised and submitted to HSCB HQ within **3 working days**. Please do not wait until the end of the year to submit copies of all closed complaints!

If you require any assistance or guidance in respect of the Complaints Procedure, please do not hesitate to contact the Board for advice, on (028) 9536 3893.