

Ten Minute Guide to Influencing the NHS in England

This Ten Minute Guide provides an overview of structures and approaches to influence the NHS in England. Much of it applies equally to the other countries of the United Kingdom but there are some differences. Additional Ten Minute Guides consider selected techniques in more detail.

1. Introduction

Your approach to influencing the NHS will depend upon the nature of your concern. The key considerations will be:

- Whether the issue relates to treatment of an individual or whether it is broader than that
- The organisation or organisations that are the subject of your concern
- Whether you are concerned about something that is already happening or something that is being planned

2. Issues affecting you or another individual

If you want to share your thoughts or concerns about the care that you have received, or that someone you know has received, there are a number of people who might be addressed, for example:

- The clinician concerned (doctor, nurse, therapist, counsellor etc)
- The support staff
- Ward, department or practice manager
- The Director who is responsible
- The Chief Executive

2.1 Support from the Patient Advice and Liaison Service

If you would like advice on who to approach, and your care was provided by an NHS Trust, we would suggest that you contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Manager of that Trust. The PALS Manager may be able to address the issue directly, or may put you in touch with someone who can help. If it turns out that you would like to make a formal complaint, the PALS Manager can advise you on how to do so.

2.2 Patient Participation Groups in GP surgeries

If you wish to comment on something that happened within your GP practice, the first contact is usually with the practice manager. There may also be a Patient Participation Group in place that can listen to your concerns and relay them to the practice, anonymously if you prefer. The PPG will contain

members of the public who have an established relationship with the practice and who strive to improve the care that is provided and to promote the health of the local community. If they cannot help, they may be able to advise you who you might next approach.

2.3 Foundation Hospitals

If the issue relates to a Foundation Trust, and other approaches have not worked, you may wish to approach one of the members of the public who sits as a Governor (Foundation Hospitals have different structures to other Trusts). If you are not satisfied, the Regulator of Foundation Trusts is called Monitor and can be called on 020 7340 2400. More information is at www.monitor-nhsft.gov.uk

2.4 The Healthcare Commission

Independent advice is available from other sources. First, the Healthcare Commission is responsible for assessing the performance of healthcare organisations. You can let them know of concerns that you have and this will feed into their reviews of the Trust concerned. For more information, email feedback@healthcarecommission.org.uk or telephone the Helpline on 0845 601 3012 or visit www.healthcarecommission.org.uk

2.5 Independent Complaints Advocacy Services

Support is also available from the Independent Complaints Advocacy Services (ICAS). This supports patients and their carers wishing to pursue a complaint about their NHS treatment or care. The service was launched on 1 September 2003 and provides for the first time a national service delivered to agreed quality standards. Details of your local provider can be found at: <http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk/articles/article.aspx?articleID=547#>

3. Issues that affect larger numbers of people

Your concern may relate to broader questions that affect significant numbers of people, such as the services that are provided, or where they are provided. They may involve planned closures or big decisions about relocating services, often referred to as reconfigurations. In this case, other levers are more likely to be helpful.

3.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The Health and Social Care Act 2001 formally enabled authorities with responsibility for social services to review and scrutinise health service matters, and to make reports and recommendations to NHS bodies. The

OSCs therefore have political importance and you can ask your local councillor to explain how to raise concerns with them. For more information on their work, visit www.cfps.org.uk/health

3.2 Local Involvement Networks

From April 2008, PPI Forums in England have been replaced by Local Involvement Networks. These are intended to strengthen the voice of the community and are able to request information, carry out visits, issue reports and recommendations and refer issues to the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. They will be expected to consult with local people about what matters to them, and to influence decisions about which services are available locally. For more information, visit: www.dh.gov.uk/en/Managingyourorganisation/PatientAndPublicinvolvement/DH_076366

4. Conclusions

It is not always easy to find the best way to influence the NHS. The following tips may help you to be as influential as possible.

- You can often make your point quite persuasively by asking questions that will expose flaws in the arguments that are being made to justify a decision. If you do not receive a reply, you can approach your Local Involvement Network since Trusts are obliged to respond to their requests for information.
- Those providing care and making decisions about the use of resources are generally trying to do the best that they can. A hostile approach is often misplaced and counterproductive.
- Your influence will generally be greater if you can demonstrate that your concerns are widely shared. In searching for allies, you might consider who is likely to share your viewpoint. You can also consider who might have resources to support your case, locally or nationally.
- Ensure that you reach the decision-makers where necessary. This may require you to move beyond the front-line manager to speak to budget-holders or Board members who have the power to do things differently.

The National Association for Patient Participation would be pleased to offer impartial advice. See www.napp.org.uk for contact details. Please address any feedback on this guide to graham.box@napp.org.uk.

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