

Ms Ann Abraham
Parliamentary and Health
Service Ombudsman
Millbank Tower
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London SW1P 4QP

17 June 2008

Dear Ann

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your draft 'Principles of Good Complaint Handling'. Overall, we found the principles and the supporting text clear, and we certainly agree with all of the principles. We only have some minor suggestions to make, which we hope you will find useful in finalising the document.

- Under "Being Customer Focussed" we would advise a change of wording from "letting people know about advocacy services where appropriate to do so" to "letting people know about independent advice and advocacy services available to them". The word 'independent' is important and may help NHS bodies avoid thinking that information about their internal services such as PALS is sufficient. It is important to use the word 'advice' as well as 'advocacy', as for some people 'advocacy' has a very specific meaning. We do not think public bodies should be the judge of when independent help is "appropriate".
- Under "Being Open and Accountable" we think it would be appropriate in the supporting text to point out that providing an honest response if in reality is not 'upheld', together with clear explanation as to why. It is in no one's interests to allow a complainant to think that their complaint has been taken on board when it has not. This might result in delay and stress and/or the complainant missing opportunities to have their complaint reviewed independently.
- Linked to the above point, under "seeking continuous improvement" the supporting text should make clear that 'assurance that lessons have been learnt' should only be given when that is the case. We see examples of where such assurances are given when they are not genuine.
- Under "Putting things Right", in deciding on an appropriate remedy, we suggest that in the supporting text discussion with the complainant about what an appropriate remedy would be, if they have not made that clear, should be added.

- Under “Seeking Continuous Improvement” we suggest that the supporting text also suggests audit/analysis of how the complaints process itself is conducted, including satisfaction surveys and/or interviews with complainants.

I hope you find these suggestions helpful and would be happy to discuss further.

Kind regards.

Yours sincerely

Peter Walsh

Peter Walsh
Chief Executive