

Organising your complaint

There is often a lot to keep organised as part of the complaints process:

- You will send and receive letters
- You may make phone calls or send and receive e-mails
- You might go to meetings
- You could ask for information from your medical records
- You might want to research into a particular aspect of care

It can be helpful to keep everything together in a single file - so you can find that really important piece of information just when you need it.

Your personal complaint file

Most stationery stores sell a number of different file holders. It doesn't matter whether you get a ring binder, a file with loads of see-through pockets which you can slide things into or just a plain old document wallet (cardboard folder). Get something that is easy for you to find and that you think will help you to keep everything together in a logical order.

What to put in your file

We think there are several important things to keep in your file. If you do the things listed below, you will find it much easier to find things when you need them - and anyone working with you on your complaint will be able to see what's important.

1. Complaint management diary

This is simply a list of everything you do that's concerned with your complaint. It doesn't need to be anything more complicated than a simple 3 column list (we have put some examples in *italics* to give you an idea):

Date	Time (if relevant)	Action
10 April 2014	10.30	<i>Phoned Healthwatch, made appointment to see them.</i>
15 April 2014	2.00	<i>Met Healthwatch for an hour. We discussed my complaint. They talked me through the self help pack.</i>
17 April 2014		<i>Sent Healthwatch my draft complaint letter.</i>
19 April 2014		<i>Received response from Healthwatch. Made a few changes to complaint letter.</i>
22 April 2014		<i>Sent complaint letter to hospital.</i>

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Date	Time (if relevant)	Action
29 April 2014		<i>Received acknowledgement from hospital. They are going to investigate and expect to get in touch in 5 weeks.</i>

It's probably easiest to keep your complaint management diary at the beginning of your file so it's handy if you need to refer to it any time.

2. Copy letters file

This is for you to keep every letter or e-mail you send and receive in the same place. It's probably easiest to file them in reverse order - so the most recent one is on top and the oldest at the bottom. It's usually the recent stuff you need to refer to so doing it this way makes it quicker to find.

If Healthwatch is helping you with your complaint we will also keep a copy letters file. Every time you send or receive something it's a good idea to check that we have a copy.

3. Phone conversation notes

You may speak to people over the phone about your complaint. It's useful to keep a note of your phone conversations. You can file these notes with your copy letters or keep them in a separate section of your file - whatever makes most sense to you.

The main things to make a note of are:

- The name of the person you spoke to
- Their phone number
- The date & time you spoke
- What were the main things you talked about?
- What happens next:
 - Did you agree any actions?
 - Who will do them?
 - When do they expect them to be done by?

If your phone conversation is with Healthwatch, we will make our own notes and keep them in our copy of your file.

4. Meeting notes

You may have face to face meetings about your complaint. It's useful to keep a note of these, even if the people you are meeting with are making notes.

You can file these notes with your copy letters or keep them in a separate section of your file - whatever makes most sense to you.

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The main things to make a note of are:

- The name of the people at the meeting and what their role is (don't be afraid to ask and to check you have spelt things right)
- Don't forget to include yourself and anyone who is supporting you
- The date, time and place you met
- What were the main things you talked about?
- What happens next:
 - Did you agree any actions?
 - Who will do them?
 - When do they expect them to be done by?

If Healthwatch is involved in your meeting, we will make our own notes and keep them in our copy of your file. Our notes may only be very brief so you may still want to make your own. We do not offer a minute writing service for complaints meetings.

5. Other information

If you have done any research or asked for information from your medical records you may find it helpful to keep this in a separate section of your file. This will make it easier to find, without having to go through all the information about every letter, e-mail, phone call and meeting.

You don't have to follow all our suggestions - they are just pointers to help you. Everyone thinks differently and organises their thoughts differently. Your complaint file is just a tool to help you remember things and to be able to access your information easily when you need it.

How you organise your complaint is very personal - you choose what you think will work best for you!

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