



COMPLAINTS ANNUAL REPORT

1 APRIL 2014 - 31 MARCH 2015

Introduction

This is the seventh Complaints Annual Report for the Northern Health and Social Care Trust (NHSCT) covering the year 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. The NHSCT provides a broad range of health and social care services for people across the local council areas of Antrim, Ballymena, Ballymoney, Carrickfergus, Coleraine, Cookstown, Larne, Magherafelt, Moyle and Newtown-abbey. The Northern Trust provides services for a population of approximately 436,000 which is the largest resident population in Northern Ireland.

The report sets out a detailed analysis of the nature and number of complaints and concerns received by the Trust. The overall number of complaints received has decreased from 783 to 771 this year. During the year we have continued to encourage more meaningful engagement and involvement with our patients and service users, ensuring that appropriate remedial action is taken and that lessons are continually learned to prevent a recurrence.

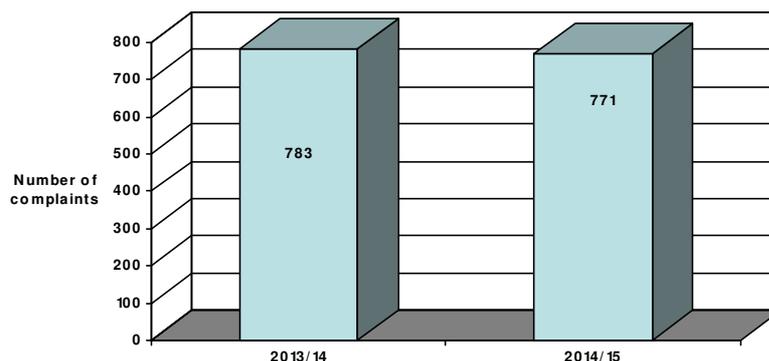
We aim to respond to complaints within 20 working days, where possible and strive to ensure that there is a full, fair and objective investigation of the issues and concerns raised and that an effective response/outcome is provided. The Trust must offer every opportunity to exhaust local resolution and therefore encourages complainants to contact the Trust again should they remain dissatisfied. We will continue to do our utmost to resolve complaints.

Many of the complaints during 2014/15 were received by letter (35%) or through the Trust's service user feedback form (34%). Another 28% were received by email. The remainder (3%) were received by telephone, in person or through Trust staff.

Compliments and suggestions/comments made by patients and service users are acknowledged and shared with relevant staff/teams.

Annual comparison of complaints

The total number of complaints received in the financial year, 1 April 2014 - 31 March 2015, was 771 compared with 783 received during the previous financial year (1 April 2013- 31 March 2014).



What our service users complained about

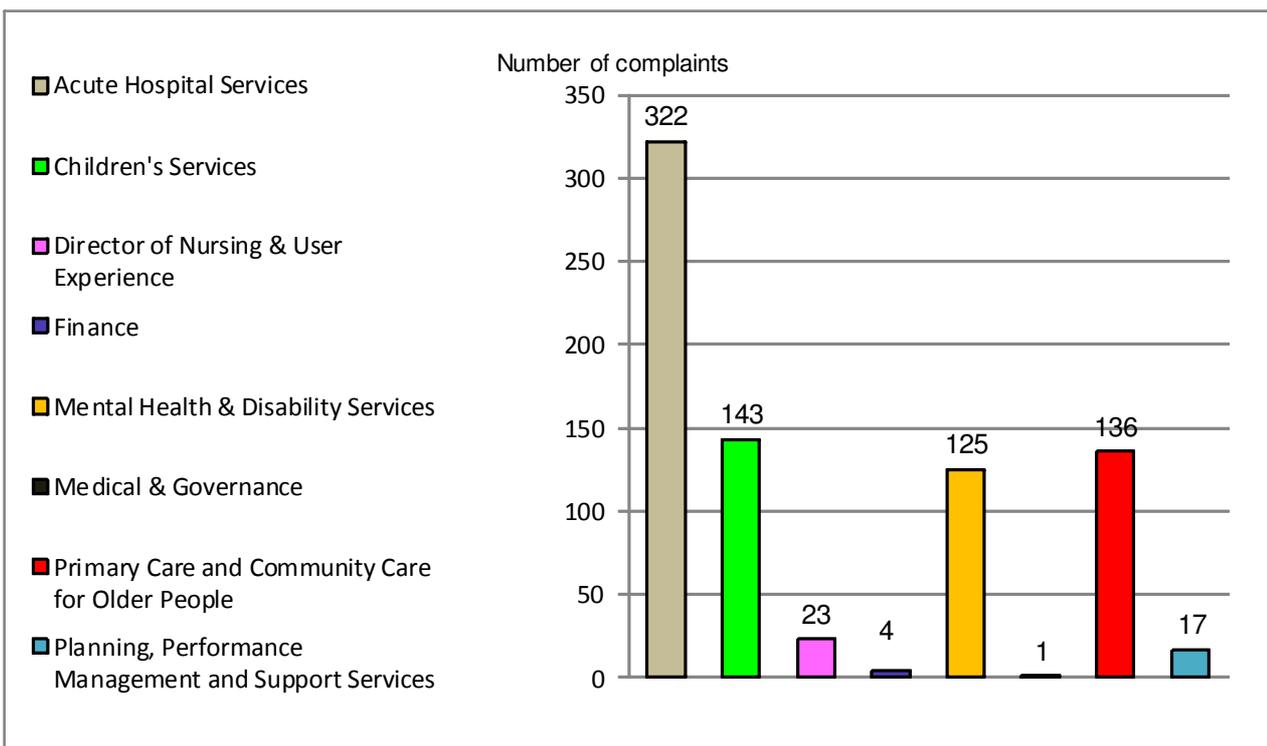
Subject	Number of issues	Percentage
Treatment & Care, Quality	256	28.76%
Staff Attitude/Behaviour	143	16.1%
Communication/Information to Patients	65	7.30%
Policy/Commercial Decisions	64	7.19%
Professional Assessment of Need	52	5.84%
Waiting List, Delay/Cancellation Community Based Appointments	39	4.38%
Waiting List, Delay/Cancellation Outpatient Appointments	36	4.04%
Clinical Diagnosis	33	3.7%
Hotel/Support/Security Services	22	2.47%
Discharge/Transfer Arrangements	18	2.02%
Other	162	18.20%

771 complaints were received in total. This equates to 890 issues.

Of the 771 complaints received, 69 were re-opened during the 2014/15 financial year (8.95%).

Which Directorates received complaints?

41.76% of the complaints received during 2014/15 were in relation to services within the Acute Hospital Services Directorate. Specialties across the whole Trust receiving the highest number of complaints included Community/Primary Care, Family & Child Care, Mental Health Services and Emergency Medicine.



Response Times

The HSC Complaints Procedure outlines that complaints should be acknowledged within 2 working days and that complaints should be responded to within 20 working days, if at all possible.

Various factors can impact on the time taken to investigate a complaint such as information may be awaited from other agencies or due to the complexity of the complaint investigation.

During 2014/15, 67% of complaints were responded to within 20 working days, which is an improvement on the previous years' response time of 58%.

	Number of complaints	Percentage
Acknowledged < 2 days	771	100%
Response < 20 days	516	67%

Monitoring, Reporting, Learning

The Trust values all feedback received from patients and service users including complaints. When there is an identified need to improve our services we will take the necessary actions to ensure these improvements happen.

In order to record and monitor complaints activity, the complaints department is required to maintain a database of complaints and provide regular reports to senior management, directorates, and various Committees within the Assurance Framework including the User Feedback & Involvement Committee. These reports highlight themes and trends across the Trust to ensure learning takes place. The Trust continues to provide monthly monitoring returns to the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB) regarding lessons learned from all complaints closed each month.

An action / learning proforma is completed, where appropriate, for complaints. We use this information to provide feedback to patients, service users and staff on the changes and improvements made. Complaints are discussed with relevant staff and issues brought to staff meetings where service improvements are agreed. A number of improvements have been introduced during 2014/15 following complaints. Listed below are some examples of learning across directorates:

The issue of communication is a recurrent theme from complainants, specifically in relation to updating relatives about their family member's treatment and care. As a result, work is progressing across all wards to improve visibility and availability of staff during visiting hours and/or other designated times. In addition, Ward Sisters conduct a ward round during afternoon visiting to engage with patients and their families. Nursing teams have also developed ward information leaflets for patients and their families.

Staff attitude and behaviour is another recurring issue raised by complainants during 2014/15. The Trust recognises that patient experience is a key element in the delivery of quality healthcare. The Trust fully supports the *'Hello my name is...'* campaign, and awareness sessions have been provided to all staff across the Trust. All Trust staff, regardless of their role have been asked to introduce themselves to clients and service users when they first meet them. This is not only a sign of basic courtesy and respect, but also should help patients and service users feel safe while receiving care and help build relationships and trust.

Waiting lists for care packages is also a common theme of many complaints. As a result, the Trust has introduced a brokerage system which will review availability of contracted providers daily rather than weekly, and this will help to reduce the number of service users waiting for packages of care.

Finally, a number of complaints were received from service users advising that they had difficulty to finding the department locations for their appointments. Therefore, the Trust has agreed to issue building location maps with appointment letters to aid service users.

Compliments

Services across the Trust receive many compliments on a frequent basis, in the form of written thank-you letters or cards or verbal feedback. A number of compliments are received directly by the Chief Executive which are forwarded on to relevant services by complaints and service user experience staff and directly to service areas. Between 1 April 2014 and 31 March 2015, 780 compliments were received through the Chief Executive's Office relating to a wide range of different service areas. Directorates/services also monitor the compliments they receive locally. Staff are greatly encouraged by the positive comments/feedback.

Children Order Complaints

Complaints by, or on behalf of children about services provided to them under Part IV of the Children (NI) Order 1995, are dealt with under a separate procedure—the Children Order Representations & Complaints Procedure.

Over the year, there were seven complaints dealt with under this procedure and these were all resolved at the informal “problem solving” stage.

The timescale for responding to Children Order complaints is 28 days. Six of these were responded to within 20 days with the exception of one, which was a very complex case.

Additional information

There were 242 formal enquiries and 75 informal enquiries received during 2014/15 with most being received from MLAs, MPs or local Councillors. A number of these were also received from service users, carers or other third parties.

During 2014/15 complaints training was provided to Trust staff working in a number of different services and departments across the Trust. Complaints training was also included in a number of other courses delivered during the financial year including corporate induction, managers' induction and NVQ training.

If complainants are dissatisfied:

Sometimes people are not always happy with the outcome of the investigation into their complaint. We would encourage people to let us know if they are unhappy, and we will consider other options to attempt to resolve their concerns. We routinely offer to meet complainants, as this allows the opportunity for more detailed discussions, on a face to face basis.

Ombudsman

For those who remain dissatisfied they may approach the NI Commissioner for Complaints (Ombudsman Office) directly. In 2014/15, there were 5 requests for information received from the Ombudsman. One case was closed following initial contact, and another one was closed and an apology issued and three are still ongoing. Two cases which were opened in previous years were closed during 2014/15, and apologies were issued.