

## Sharing your feedback & complaints in Lancashire

November 2016

Report summarising experiences of people in Lancashire when it comes to sharing feedback or making complaints to health and social care services.



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## **Introduction**

Between July and September 2016 Healthwatch Lancashire engaged with residents in Lancashire to gather their views and experiences of sharing feedback or raising complaints to health and social care organisations.

The aim of the campaign was to engage with local residents across Lancashire with a short survey to find out how easy people find it to share feedback with local services and if they have made a complaint, how they feel about the process and the outcome they received.

## **Methodology**

This study was undertaken by Healthwatch Lancashire staff and volunteers through face-to-face discussions with members of the public. These took place in a variety of locations in Lancashire including public events, in GP practices, hospitals, pharmacies and through community group workshops.

People were also able to participate by taking the survey on the Healthwatch Lancashire website and emails were distributed to the Healthwatch Lancashire public contacts database which has been established based on a representative sample of the population of Lancashire.

We gathered feedback from 136 people within Lancashire. The results are summarised within this report.

This report can be found on the Healthwatch Lancashire website:  
[www.healthwatchlancashire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchlancashire.co.uk).

The findings will be shared with those who plan, run and regulate health and social care services within Lancashire including NHS England, clinical commissioning groups, Lancashire County Council and the Care Quality Commission.

## **Acknowledgements**

Healthwatch Lancashire would like to thank all members of the public who shared their experiences included within this report.

## Results

**136** residents of Lancashire shared their views and experiences on making a health and social care complaint. The responses are summarised below:

### We asked: “What is your location?”

Responses to this question are collated into clinical commissioning group (CCG) footprints in the table below.

CCG Footprint	Responses
NHS Fylde and Wyre CCG	21%
NHS East Lancashire CCG	21%
NHS Lancashire North CCG	20%
NHS Chorley and South Ribble CCG	17%
NHS Greater Preston CCG	13%
NHS West Lancashire CCG	6%
Unspecified	2%

### We asked: “Do you know who to speak to if you want to share a positive experience or make a complaint to a health and social care organisation?”

**46%** said Yes      **27.5%** said No      **26.5%** said Not sure

### We asked: “Have you shared positive feedback with a health and social care organisation in the past 12 months?”

**36%** said Yes      **58%** said No      **6%** said would rather not say

### We asked: “Have you ever raised a complaint to a health and social care organisation in Lancashire?”

**42%** said Yes      **58%** said No

### We asked all respondents: “Have you made a complaint within the past 12 months?”

**30%** said Yes      **70%** said No



**We asked: “In the past 12 months, have you felt that you needed to make a complaint to a health and social care organisation but decided not to?”**

**48%** said Yes

**52%** said No

**We asked those who answered yes to question 4: Why did you choose not to make a complaint?”**

**26%** said they had fear of repercussion

**18%** said they couldn't face making a complaint

**18%** said they didn't want the hassle

**19%** said they didn't know who to speak to

**11%** said they intended to but never did

**9%** said they informed the staff but didn't follow the official complaints process

**Some of the comments from respondents explaining their reason not to complain are shown below;**

“It felt pointless complaining after the event as I needed help at the time.”

“The handling and reassurance needs to be better before people will feel safe and confident enough to raise concerns.”

“People put up with a lot and feel they can't complain for fear of marks put against your name when you go for your next treatment or appointment. I think this puts many off going through the procedure as they also feel that nothing will change anyway so why bother.”

“Many will not realise that you need to contact PALS to make a complaint so don't bother.”

“If you think you need to make a complaint you are usually in a crisis and at that time not able to deal with any more than dealing with the medical or caring role you are in at the time. It is only when well you are mentally able to think of a complaint by then it is too late.”

“One particular nurse treated my father-in-law badly. If he had to go to the same unit again he would have been very worried if he had to be cared for by her if he had complained against her.”

“I only know how to complain officially because I work in healthcare, otherwise I think it is unclear.”

“I want to make a complaint now even though it has been two years since my experience. I only just feel like I can discuss it. At the time I was not well enough and had my new born son to worry about. I was left very hurt by what happened.”

**35% of respondents said they had other reasons not to complain. Some of these reasons are detailed below:**

“It is a waste of time.”

“I am so stressed and feel unsupported. I feel confused about who to contact and overwhelmed. I am chipping away at it.”

“We managed to resolve it informally.”

“I know that the social care firm were short staffed & finding it difficult to recruit - not a good time to tell them that one of their carers was not doing a particularly good job.”

“I employ different care staff now, not a private company.”

“Having complained before and not getting a response, I thought: “What is the point of complaining to the hospital when nothing happens. It is a waste of time and effort.”

“I thought it wouldn't make any difference, the damage was done.”

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**We asked those who said they had made a complaint: “Which service did you raise a complaint about?”**

Results of the types of services are displayed in the table below:

Type of service	Percentage
Hospital	47%
GP	12.5%
Care Home	12.5%
Dentist	6%
Social Care	6%
Mental Health Services	6%
Pharmacy	3%
Community Services	3%
NHS 111 service	3%

**We asked: “Did you find it easy to make a complaint?”**

**45%** said Yes

**55%** said No

**We asked respondents to comment on the ease of making a complaint. An example of the comments are shown below:**

“The receptionist would not give me a form.”

“The manager and regional manager were obstructive and made excuses.”

“I was just so upset.”

“Ignorance, lack of belief, delays, communication and stigma.”

“Too cumbersome a process - needed to be made in writing.”

“I asked PALS initially but they did not help. They said that the trust should phone me back and an executive assistant did phone, but she was quite rude. I said that I would rather not make a complaint, I just wanted it not to happen to anyone else, but she told me that that was a complaint, so I had to make one.”

**Many respondents said the process of complaining was easy, however there was no response or action from the organisation following the complaint:**

“I told my midwife five days after, as this was the first time I saw my regular midwife who I felt comfortable with and she gave me a feedback form and then I sent it away and didn't hear anything back.”

“I wrote a letter to the consultant and I waited but got no reply.”

“I received no reply what so ever.”

“It was easy to send an email but we didn't get a response.”

**Many respondents were unclear about how to make a complaint:**

“Was unsure of complaint procedure.”

“Never received timely answer to letter of complaint. Not sure who to complain to.”

“No member of staff knew how to make a complaint and there were no leaflets to tell me what to do.”

“There was no clear direction in the surgery on how to make a complaint. The receptionist shrugged when I asked what I needed to do. I went online to find details and that led me to broken links and looping links that weren't too helpful. It wasn't possible to submit a complaint online either.”

“I didn't know who to contact in the social services department as people do not seem to stay in their roles - the named social worker for my mother had changed and we had

not been informed. When trying to find out who to complain to we were advised to fill in their complaints form but I deemed our complaint too serious to waste time filling in forms so I wrote directly to the director of social services in Preston.”

### **We asked: “What was the outcome of your complaint?”**

**Comments were left by respondents to tell us about the outcome of their complaint. Some examples of these comments are below:**

**Many respondents commented that there was no outcome or they were still waiting for an outcome:**

“I wrote to the NHS and got a response saying they would look into it. I never ever got a reply after that. I didn't chase it up as the situation had now long passed.”

“I didn't hear anything back.”

“Nothing, no reply from the letter of complaint.”

“Still waiting.”

“I have had no outcome from my complaint not even acknowledgement it has been received.”

**Some respondents told us about a positive outcome:**

“Very good outcome. The consultant took the time to speak to me and my husband within a couple of days of making the complaint.”

“The CQC contacted the manager which resulted in an internal investigation.”

“After a great deal of correspondence and meetings with senior social workers, which took one year to resolve, I received an unreserved apology from the director of social services.”

Despite attempted mitigation by a surgical team, the hospital admitted and recorded situation as a 'Never Event' at board level. It resulted in compensation paid in an out of court settlement.

**Other respondents told us about a negative outcome:**

“They threatened to remove me from the practice.”

“I feel the manager covered up a nurse’s failings.”

“I received a letter from the complaints manager saying that it is my word against the midwife practitioner and the breast feeding nurse. I asked in my complaint whether the midwife could be retrained in tongue-tie assessments but was told that her training was up to date and adequate. They have said in the letter that I have said things that are

untrue. They have said that they are not willing to pay for the private assessment we had. I'm just really disappointed."

"It was decided that there was no follow up required from safeguarding, but the inspector ignored the residents request to remain anonymous and did not forward the full details to the safeguarding team."

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**We asked: "Were you happy with the outcome?"**

**24%** said Yes

**55%** said No

**21%** said Not sure

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**We asked: "Taking into account your experience, how do you think the complaints process could be improved?"**

We asked respondents to comment on how they feel the complaints process could be improved. Comments are shown below.

**Some respondents said they wanted an acknowledgement after making a complaint:**

"Getting a response."

"Complaints should be followed up."

"They should respond by telephone asap after receiving a complaint to acknowledge the action to be taken and check periodically thereafter that the patient has received satisfactory response from the complained about department."

**Other respondents would have liked the complaints process to have been quicker:**

"One year to resolve is not acceptable under any circumstances."

"Immediate response by telephone and a named person to speak to. Perhaps a way to complain online."

"Complaints should be acted on there and then by the person you complain to - there should not be a lengthy process - it can take days to write a letter, by which time the member of staff could have done the same thing again."

"They should set deadlines for teams. Making patients and carers wait affects the patient more. Recordings of all conversations should be made legal. It is their word against yours, they stick together, lie or do not communicate at all. It is a disgusting long, drawn out system."

**Respondents told us they would have liked more training for staff about how to handle complaints:**

“Front line staff need to be better supported so as to feel able to adequately deal with a concern. they need the confidence either to act directly, or seek help.

“Managers need to be honest, open and transparent and not make excuses.”

**Some respondents suggested the use of online services:**

“An easy online service would be good.”

“On-line procedure and followed up by agency you complain to or investigation of procedure and protocol.”

“It would have been helpful to have an online immediate chat facility. The issues I raised were not for public ears and we were not taken anywhere private. Ideally, I would have liked for it not to happen but as it did at the least I expected an email apology with promise of better standards. Enhanced service would be online chat help with immediate resolutions.”

“In today’s technological records, replies and results should be accessible instantly and not weeks after.”

**Many respondents felt the complaints process could be improved if it was more proficient and transparent:**

“It is still ongoing. You should not be threatened for making a complaint.”

“Not causing the family to feel that it was all their fault and it’s their word against what I was told.”

“The need to make a formal complaint in writing is a massive barrier. Also the fear of repercussions if further care is needed is a barrier to making a complaint.”

“By making investigators independent from the trust.”

“I feel the hospital did not listen or even try to understand the situation.”

“For CQC inspectors to thoroughly read and pass on information!”

“The trust admitted their procedures had been breached at all levels. A lead surgeon was given early retirement but later employed on a consultancy basis which I feel inappropriate given the serious nature of the situation. It appeared that some levels are above the procedures.”

**We asked: “Did you use an advocacy service to support you in making a complaint?”**

**3%** said Yes

**97%** said No

**We asked: “Do you have any additional comments about making a health and social care complaint?”**

Some of the comments shared by respondents are shown below:

“Always keep copies of letters and documents and always send letters by recorded delivery as its surprising how many letters appear never reach their destination!”

“I would share with the service or organisation themselves firstly and then if I wasn't happy with their response I would go to an Ombudsman.”

“I would go to the town hall if I had any complaints about local services.”

“I would look online if I had a complaint and find out who to talk to.”

“I would go to the source.”

“The complaint was about private domiciliary care and I would go to the supervisor in this case. My relative didn't want me to complain because she doesn't want the hassle, she thinks the doctors do nothing about her situation anyway as they have told her in the past that her problems are due to her age, which is true.”

“I would search online to find out who to speak to if I had a complaint about a health and social care experience.”

“I would not make a complaint unless there was a very powerful reason for making it as I appreciate care providers are often stretched and new staff have to learn and be encouraged in the work which is often not easy.”

**Mental health-related responses:**

**Six responses mentioned a lack of awareness of mental health.**

“I made a complaint against unsatisfactory mental health care for my brother, who had to ask me to voice for him. That has now acted against me in the complaints process.”

“Despite warnings that a relative was relapsing in their mental health, the mental health care teams did nothing. T resulted in my relative being held in handcuffs with their feet restrained on the floor in a place of safety for some seven and a half hours”

“The doctor didn't know, so he didn't want to commit to saying anything, so he has referred us to the mental health team. It's more waiting now. The doctor assumed the person I was with wasn't working but when they said they had a job he said they must be fine. It seems they needed to have all the symptoms. We have to see different doctors at the time and repeat ourselves.”

“I went in with panic attacks and suicide notes but nothing was found or given. No one thought there was anything wrong. I felt there was no passion. It's too old to find this out when you're 19. If it's mild like me it's not noticed.”

“There are no beds in Lancashire and a lot of people waiting for beds in mental health.”

“If it's routine it's not too bad, but if it's something they don't know about, particularly mental health, they fob me off.”

**In addition, Healthwatch Lancashire recognises that there is a trend of people with mental health concerns being able to get the support they need through the complaints process. This has been picked up through a large number of telephone calls Healthwatch Lancashire received over the past 12 months.**

## **Case Studies**

Healthwatch Lancashire gathered case studies from some of the respondents following the survey.

### **“The hospital recorded the experience as a ‘Never Event’, meaning it was wholly preventable.”**

Healthwatch Lancashire heard from a patient from Preston who shared their experience of making a health complaint to a hospital.

*They said: "I raised a complaint with a surgical team at a hospital which resulted in compensation being paid in an out-of-court settlement. The hospital admitted and recorded the experience as a ‘Never Event’ at a board Level meaning the event was wholly preventable.*

*I had the surgery on my wrist and was in a cast for six weeks. I returned to the hospital to have my cast removed and the surgeon told me that they had performed the wrong operation and had actually removed a major bone from my wrist.*

*I was told I would need corrective surgery and at first I was in total shock and couldn't believe it could happen. I went home and my husband decided to ring the CEO of the hospital trust. We met with him ten days later and he was furious as the surgeons at the hospital had not followed the trusts internal procedures to document the mistake.*

*Once senior management were aware of the event they quickly followed the correct internal procedures.*

*The whole process was quite stressful to me as I had to attend a lot of meetings with the surgeons and the senior management and I wasn't aware of what the outcome might be.*

*There was no available literature of this kind of event happening before so a lot of the time I was in the dark and nobody quite knew how to handle the case.*

*Whilst I was settling this case I was also having to attend hand therapy and I couldn't drive so I had to ask people to drive me to all the appointments I required.*

*If my husband hadn't called the CEO from the hospital trust, then I wouldn't have known how to start off the complaint procedure or who to speak to about it.*

*The CEO dealt with it very well when he found out about it. The CEO was the person to recommend me to get a solicitor.*

*An occupational expert had to come to my house and assess the damage my operation had caused. I couldn't use my hand for anything. It is still never going to be fully healed.*

*It took more than two years to settle in court and for me to receive compensation.”*

**“It felt pointless complaining after the event as I needed help at the time.”**

Healthwatch Lancashire heard from a patient from South Ribble who shared their experience of making a health complaint at their local dental practice.

*They said: "I had severe pain in my mouth due to a whole filling of a large molar having fallen out, leaking foul-tasting fluid into my mouth on the Saturday of a bank holiday weekend.*

*I rang the emergency dental line. The lady on the phone said I was not allowed an emergency appointment.*

*I said I would come and wait for a spare one as I was desperate. She told me not to bother, as I wouldn't be seen. I was crying.*

*She said I would only be seen if I have extreme swelling or uncontrolled bleeding. I said if I had those symptoms then I would go to A&E.*

*The lady on the phone was rude when I was in pain and spent the whole weekend in agony until my NHS dentist opened on the Tuesday.*

*The lady had no compassion at all. I wrote to the NHS and got a response saying they would look into it. I never got a reply after that.*

*I didn't chase it up as the situation had now long passed. It felt pointless complaining after the event as I needed help at the time.*

*The complaints procedure could be improved if patients who complained received an immediate response by telephone and a named person to speak to or perhaps if there was a way to complain online straight to the service."*

**“I just want the people who got her in this situation to be aware of what has happened.”**

Healthwatch Lancashire heard from a patient who shared their experience of making a health complaint to a Lancashire hospital regarding their relative.

*They said: "My sister was in hospital after a fall and told the nurses that she had an ulcer which required a new dressing every day.*

*My sister was told by a nurse that she was not to change her dressing herself and that a nurse would do it for her.*

*She was in this hospital for seven days and she didn't have her ulcer dressing changed once.*

*I wanted to complain but my sister told me she didn't want me to so it went no further.*

*My sister was then moved to a rehab unit on a smaller hospital for recovery. One day she was told she could be discharged if she showed she was able to handle the stairs without assistance.*

*She told them she could manage and was adamant about going home so she gave it her all. My sister was discharged and since she has been home on her own she has been unable to manage her stairs.*

*The discharge care was inadequate. She has since been washing in her kitchen sink and sleeping on her recliner chair.*

*My family have been in touch with the hospital but nothing seems to be done about it. Her son rang up and complained and heard nothing back, there was just no response at all.*

*My sister complains about the way she is living but will not take action.*

*I just want the people who got her in this situation to be aware of what has happened to her."*

**"I don't feel like the situation was resolved but I didn't take it any further."**

**Healthwatch Lancashire heard from a patient from Preston who shared their experience of making a health complaint at their GP surgery.**

**They said:** *"After a recent GP appointment, I felt like I wanted to complain and I didn't find the process easy at all.*

*There was no clear direction within the surgery on how to make a complaint. The receptionist shrugged when I asked what I needed to do.*

*I went online to find details and that led me to broken links and looping links that were not too helpful.*

*It wasn't possible to submit a complaint online either. I wrote a letter to the practice and I received a letter on behalf of the practice manager apologising but received no offer of making another appointment.*

*"There was absolutely no response to my suggestion to improve the experience for other patients.*

*I don't feel like the situation was resolved but I didn't take it any further. I think the complaints procedure could be improved if there were clear directions in the surgery on how to complain, and if there was adequate training for staff on the complaints procedure and if it was easy to send a complaint online to the health or social care facility."*

## **Summary of Findings**

- **27.5%** of respondents said they didn't know who to share positive or negative feedback with.
- **52%** of people said that they felt they needed to complain in the last 12 months but decided not to.
- **55%** of people said it wasn't easy to make a complaint and weren't happy with the outcome. The reasons related to lack of information, communications and difficulties with the process.
- **97%** of people did not use an advocacy service to support them in making a complaint.