

# How to contact South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust

This handy pull out guide has been designed to help you access the appropriate help when you have concerns or questions about the ambulance service in the South West. Why not put this guide in a safe place for future reference, for example, keep it with your telephone book.

There are numerous ways to contact the ambulance service but the easiest and by far the most simplest method is to contact the newly revamped and modernised Patient, Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

This patient led service was first launched a couple of years ago but recent changes have seen a marked improvement in the availability of the service, not least because the team are now centralised at Trust HQ in Exeter.

This has resulted in much more resilience and capacity to ensure patients, carers and staff can always be sure that there will be an on the spot response within week day normal office hours.

## What difference will PALS make to the local NHS?

PALS focuses on improving and developing the local NHS by listening to your concerns, suggestions and queries and acting upon them, where possible.

### How independent is PALS?

PALS has been set up by the NHS and is not an external organisation. However all staff will put the interest of the patients first.

### What does the PALS service provide?

The service provides:

- On the spot advice and support to

patients, their families and carers;

- On the spot advice and support to staff;
- Accessible information on how to navigate the plethora of NHS services;
- A dedicated team of staff to listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries;
- Opportunities to have your voice heard, feedback or simply comment upon the ambulance service
- Join in the work of the Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) or Equality and Diversity teams.

### How soon can I expect a response?

We have set ourselves a target to try and acknowledge your request within 2 working days and respond within 25 working days.

### What if I'm not satisfied?

If the PALS service does not resolve matters we will refer you to our Complaints Manager. We will fully explain all other options of help to you.

### How to contact PALS

Office hours are 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday. Write to South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust, Abbey Court, Eagle Way, Exeter, Devon EX2 7HY  
**Tel** 01392 261585  
**Fax** 01392 261560  
**Email** pals@swast.nhs.uk

“ This patient led service was first launched a couple of years ago but recent changes have seen a marked improvement in the availability of the service ”

# How to make a *complaint*

If you are not satisfied with the treatment or service you have received from the ambulance service, you are entitled to make a complaint and receive an appropriate response.

The NHS complaints procedure applies to the NHS in England (except for NHS Foundation Trusts).

### Who can complain?

A complaint can be made by a patient or person affected or likely to be affected by the actions or decisions of an NHS organisation or primary care practitioner. A complaint can also be made by someone acting on behalf of the patient or person, with their consent.

### What is the time limit for making a complaint?

You should complain within 6 months of the event(s) concerned or within 6 months of becoming aware that you have something to complain about. The trust has discretion to waive this time limit if there are good reasons why you could not complain earlier.

### Local Resolution

The first stage of the NHS complaints procedure is called 'Local Resolution'.

This initial process aims to resolve complaints quickly, as close to the source of the complaint as possible, using the most appropriate means; for example, use of conciliation.

However, if this does not work, you may continue with your complaint, either verbally or by writing, including

email to the Chief Executive or the Complaint Manager. See 'How to contact the complaints department'

If you make your complaint verbally a written record will be made by the Complaint Manager.

You will receive a response from the Chief Executive within 25 working days and be kept fully informed of progress as far as is practicable.

If your complaint spans several organisations or is very complex the Complaint Manager will seek your agreement to negotiate a longer response time to ensure that a thorough and comprehensive investigation is carried out.

### Independent Review

If you are unhappy with the response to your complaint, you can

# Respect and dignity - Our commitment to you... Your commitment to us...

For patients or others who have recently made a complaint or are possibly thinking of making a complaint about the ambulance service but perhaps feel concerned or frightened about the process, an explanatory leaflet has recently been designed and launched to help put everyone's mind at rest.

This initiative was as a result of analysing complaint letters and talking to members of the public who were in contact with the Complaints Department regarding some of the concerns raised about the entering the complaints process.

The Complaints team recognised that some people are very concerned about making a complaint and fully understand this task may seem daunting.

The team wanted to respond to this issue and to assure everyone of the dignified process in place to handle complaints. They further wished to provide reassurance to complainants that they should feel comfortable about commenting on their experience, even though this might be difficult.

By receiving important feedback when things go wrong the staff concerned can reflect and take forward the experiential learning from the lessons learnt to ensure that any mistakes will not happen again.

A clear audit of complaints is managed and this helps the organisation as a whole to identify any trends for improvement. These regular data analysis exercises form the basis of anonymised case studies that further inform trust educational training courses.

This continuous cycle of learning is helping the trust to become a listening organisation that learns and acts upon patient feedback.

### Respect and dignity

To further reassure members of the public that the trust takes all feedback very seriously, a professional team of dedicated independent staff are based at the ambulance service trust headquarters in Exeter.

These staff are trained to deal sensitively and respectfully with complaints or feedback on services. They work within the Chief Executive's Directorate which demonstrates the

importance the trust puts on this patient focussed work.

### Overcoming fear

In the past, some members of the public have commented that they are frightened to make a complaint for fear of discrimination in the future if they require help from the ambulance service again. The new Respect and Dignity leaflet is aimed to reassure complainants that this will not happen.

### Our commitment to you

In order to assure complainants of the ambulance service's genuine commitment to provide an open, transparent and equitable service, whether views have been fed back to the trust or not, the new leaflet explicitly states a pledge to provide a first class emergency and urgent care service free from discrimination or prejudice.

### Equality and diversity

Find out more about this wholehearted commitment by reading our Equality and Diversity strategy and associated work at [www.swast.nhs.uk / Publications / Disability Equality Scheme](http://www.swast.nhs.uk/Publications/DisabilityEqualityScheme).

### Your commitment to us

We know that members of the public would also like to demonstrate their commitment to staff by ensuring that they too pledge to treat staff with respect and dignity.

Please remember that you can support ambulance staff by cooperating with their requests. For example, staying calm, carefully listening and responding to questions about an accident or experience. This can save valuable minutes for the crews and help them assess the situation fully and obtain crucial facts to ensure all casualties receive the right treatment.

Why not visit [www.swast.nhs.uk](http://www.swast.nhs.uk) and view the new leaflet to find out more on how the trust is taking forward this transparent and open approach to providing reassurance to members of the public and staff that everyone will be treated fairly and free from discrimination. You may even wish to feedback some views by using the interactive link on the site.

ask the Healthcare Commission for an 'Independent Review' of your case.

The Healthcare Commission is an independent body established to promote improvements in healthcare. You can contact the Commission at: Healthcare Commission, FREEPOST NAT 18958, Complaints Investigation Team, Manchester M1 9XZ

**Tel** 0845 601 3012  
**Email** complaints@healthcarecommission.org.uk  
**Website** [www.healthcarecommission.org.uk](http://www.healthcarecommission.org.uk)

### The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

If you remain dissatisfied after Local Resolution and an Independent

Review, you can complain to the Health Service Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman is completely independent of the NHS and Government. You can contact the Ombudsman at: Millbank Tower, Millbank, London SW1P 4QP  
**Tel** 0845 015 4033

### Where can I get further advice and help?

The Independent Complaints Advocacy Services, known as ICAS provide further advice and support to people who want to complain about the NHS. They can be contacted on 0845 120 3782 or visit [www.dh.gov.uk](http://www.dh.gov.uk).

Round the clock advice can also be obtained from NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or try their new

online service at [www.nhs.direct](http://www.nhs.direct)

If you prefer to see someone face to face there are numerous local Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) across the four counties of Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly, Devon, Dorset and Somerset. Your local phonebook can provide details of their opening hours and locations.

### How to contact the Complaints Department

Open during office hours from Monday to Friday. Write to South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust, Abbey Court, Eagle Way, Exeter, Devon EX2 7HY.

**Tel** 01392 261505  
**Email** [publicrelations@swast.nhs.uk](mailto:publicrelations@swast.nhs.uk)

## Your complaint - what happens next?

In order to help complainants understand the ambulance service process for handling complaints, a detailed leaflet has been produced called 'Your complaint – What Happens Next?'

This publication is sent out with an acknowledgement letter of the initial complaint and the target time for the information to be dispatched is within 2 working days.

The leaflet sets out these explanations:

### What can I expect?

On receipt of your letter, telephone call, email, fax or the feedback form contained in the 'Tell Us About It' leaflet, your complaint is registered and you will receive an acknowledgement letter.

You are entitled to see any information held on our computer database relating to your complaint under the Data Protection Act.

A copy of your complaint is forwarded to an investigating

officer who may contact you or request a home visit to resolve your complaint as quickly as possible.

When the investigation is complete a full report of your complaint will be reviewed by the Service and personally by the Chief Executive. You will then receive a full and comprehensive reply which answers all points raised.

### How soon can I expect a response?

We aim to complete our investigations and provide you with a response within 25 working days. Unfortunately delays may occur because more complex details might be required. You will of course be informed of the reasons for any delays.

### What if my complaint involves other organisations?

If your complaint involves other organisations, we will work with their complaints team to ensure a joint investigation is carried out. We will keep you fully informed of all actions.

### What action will be taken?

When the service has been poor, an apology will be made and appropriate redress considered. Details on any action which has been taken to prevent the problem happening again will be outlined in your response letter. Disciplinary action may be taken after a complaint has been made if proven valid but this is considered separately under a different procedure, and is confidential to the Trust.

### What if I am not satisfied?

This section mirrors the information of supplementary and independent sources of help featured in the How to Make a Complaint section above.

### Who can help with my complaint?

The trust has a responsibility to ensure all concerns and complaints are dealt with according to NHS regulations.

The trust's Complaint Manager will provide complainants relevant information on the correct procedures and what to do or expect at each stage of the process.

## Tell Us About It

This new feedback initiative provides members of the public with a mechanism on how to share important views and feedback about the ambulance service.

It includes a new leaflet called 'Tell Us About It' that features a short questionnaire for everyone to complete and send back to help the ambulance service to capture views and subsequently improve services based on that feedback.

### Why 'Tell Us About It'?

The trust aims to provide the highest quality pre-hospital care, treatment and ambulance transport.

Comments from members of the public, positive or negative, are always appreciated on ambulance services to assist the trust to make continuous improvements to the services provided.

This feedback is helping the trust realise one of its main aspirations to become a truly patient led service.

Turning these words into actions is an incredibly powerful improvement tool for everyone involved and a new reporting system has subsequently been designed

called 'You Said We Did'.

This is helping the trust demonstrate and evidence that all developmental actions shaped around patient feedback have been put into place.

This patient focussed report is already being issued quarterly to internal and external reporting bodies for open scrutiny and comment.

### What kind of things might you want to tell us about?

If you are happy or unhappy with the care, advice or assistance you received;

- Have an idea or suggestion that could improve our services
- Would like some information about your ambulance crew attendance or other responding healthcare professional or clarification about why you were treated (or advised) the way you were;
- Would like some information about your contact with the out of hours service called the Urgent Care Service (UCS) that operates in Dorset and Somerset;
- Want to join the ambulance service Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) or Equality and Diversity work groups;

