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Review of NHS Complaints Handling  
Department of Health  
Room 5E43, Quarry House  
Quarry Hill  
Leeds LS2 7UE

07 June 2013

Dear Ms Clwyd and Professor Hart,

### **Review of NHS Complaints Handling**

Healthwatch England welcomes the opportunity to respond to the review, aimed at ensuring that all hospitals listen to and act upon the concerns of patients. As the new, independent statutory consumer champion for health and social care in England, our role is to represent the interests of all those who use health and social care services. The Healthwatch England Committee has identified the right to redress, including complaints, as a major priority for work in 2013/14 and we plan on carrying out a range of further work to support this.

We are already working with emerging local Healthwatch organisations to help build a national picture of the trends and issues that matter most to people, and we have already started gathering initial views from local Healthwatch about how complaints processes are working in their areas.

We know from our own early research that complaints are a major issue right across health and social care. We would therefore encourage the Review to include recommendations that are transferable to primary care and social care as part of its work.

Our own initial work on complaints across the health and care systems has identified the following key issues for consumers:

- there is a lack of confidence in the system dealing with issues confidentially and without detrimental effect on receipt of care so many complaints are not voiced;
- the complaints system can be off-putting, complex and slow;
- where organisations encourage feedback and listen with respect, individuals will feel more comfortable to register concerns, complaints and compliments and this will provide rich information for organisations;
- there is limited confidence that making a complaint will lead to learning and change;



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- when people do complain, they are unlikely to secure a satisfactory resolution for a complaint; and
- there is a lack of relevant national information, so the ability of the system to learn from complaints is restricted.

As you are aware, the webinar we are hosting on 18th June with local Healthwatch will provide the opportunity for you explore these issues in more detail with local Healthwatch, hearing their views and experiences on how complaints processes are working across health and social care in their areas.

At our national conference on 20<sup>th</sup> June we will be launching our work on the current complaints processes in health and social care. This will outline views and concerns about the current complaints systems in health and social care that users of health and cares services have flagged to us. This work then starts to consider what a good complaints system for consumers should look like, a concept that we will be developing with our committee. In addition, we are working with partners to produce a leaflet explaining the complaints process and will be publishing further materials on our website [www.healthwatch.co.uk](http://www.healthwatch.co.uk) during 2013/14.

We will share our embargoed work on complaints with you prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> June, and will continue to be in contact after the webinar to discuss how the feedback from local Healthwatch is being considered as part of the Review.

Yours sincerely,

**Chief Executive of Healthwatch England**