

Complaints information on GP websites

A supplementary report to the 'NHS and Social Care Complaints' report published October 2023

Report published 29 January 2024

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Context

In 2023 we asked people to share their experiences of making a complaint about NHS or social care services in Shropshire within the last two years.

One of the key findings was that people found using complaints processes difficult to navigate or confusing. [NHS and Social Care Complaints Report | Healthwatch Shropshire](#)

During this project it became apparent that the information given to patients by GP practices via their websites about the NHS complaints process was quite varied and in some cases incomplete and / or out of date.

What we did

We decided to ask a new staff member and a volunteer to assess the information they found on the 37 websites of the practices in Shropshire, a full list is supplied at the end of the report.

To ensure consistency we gave both people the same scenario and asked them to assess the information available, how easy it was to find and how they felt their complaint would be dealt with by the practice based on what they read.

Scenario

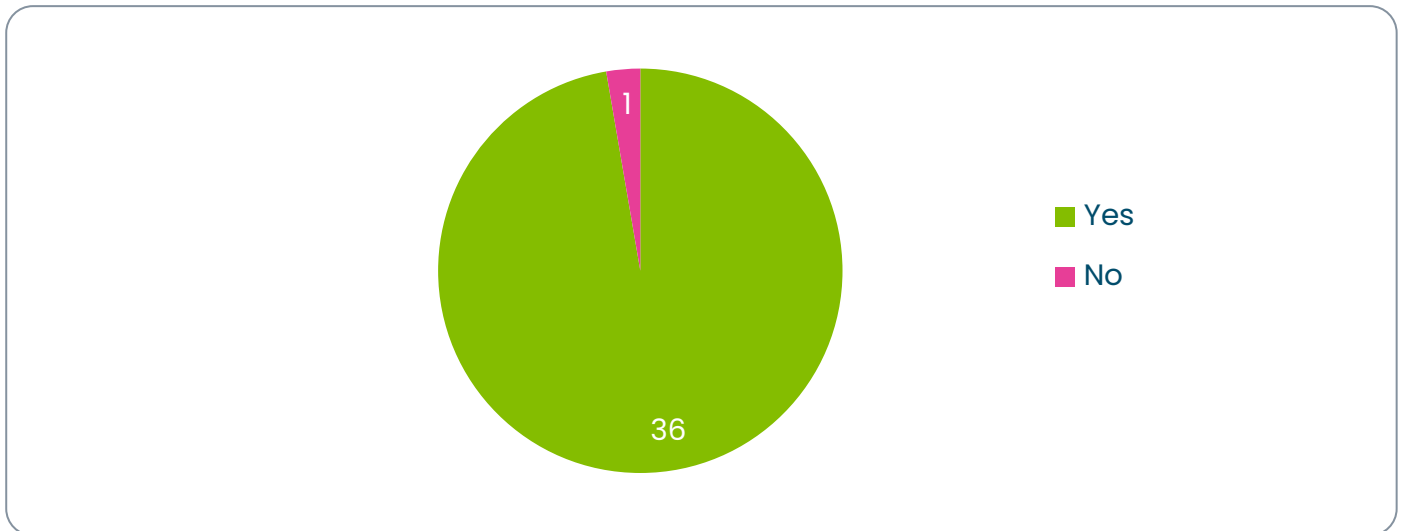
(Based on actual feedback received)

“When I call the surgery the receptionists ask a lot of questions about why you are calling, detailed questions about the issue you wish to speak to the doctor about. They are not medically trained and should not be triaging patients. If you decline and tell them that you don't feel comfortable discussing your medical issues with them they refuse to give you an appointment. I have raised the issue with the reception staff but my concerns were not listened to. I now wish to make a formal complaint.”

Please visit the GP website and find out how to lodge this complaint.

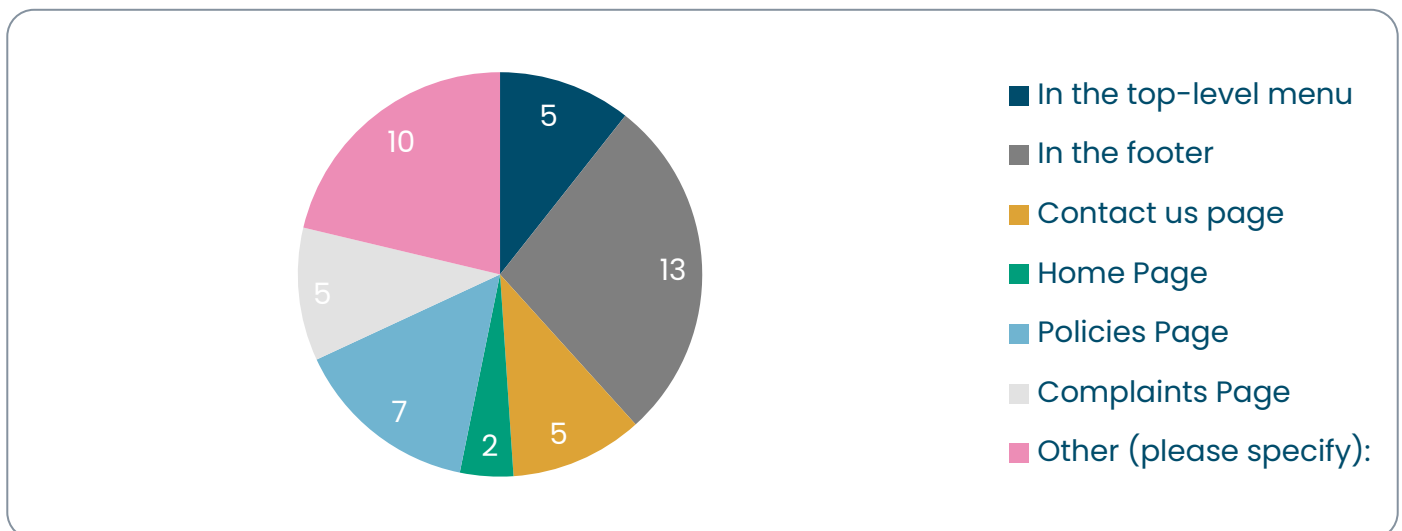
What we found out

Is there information on the website about making a complaint?



All practices bar one had information on their website.

Where on the site is the complaints information or links to the information?

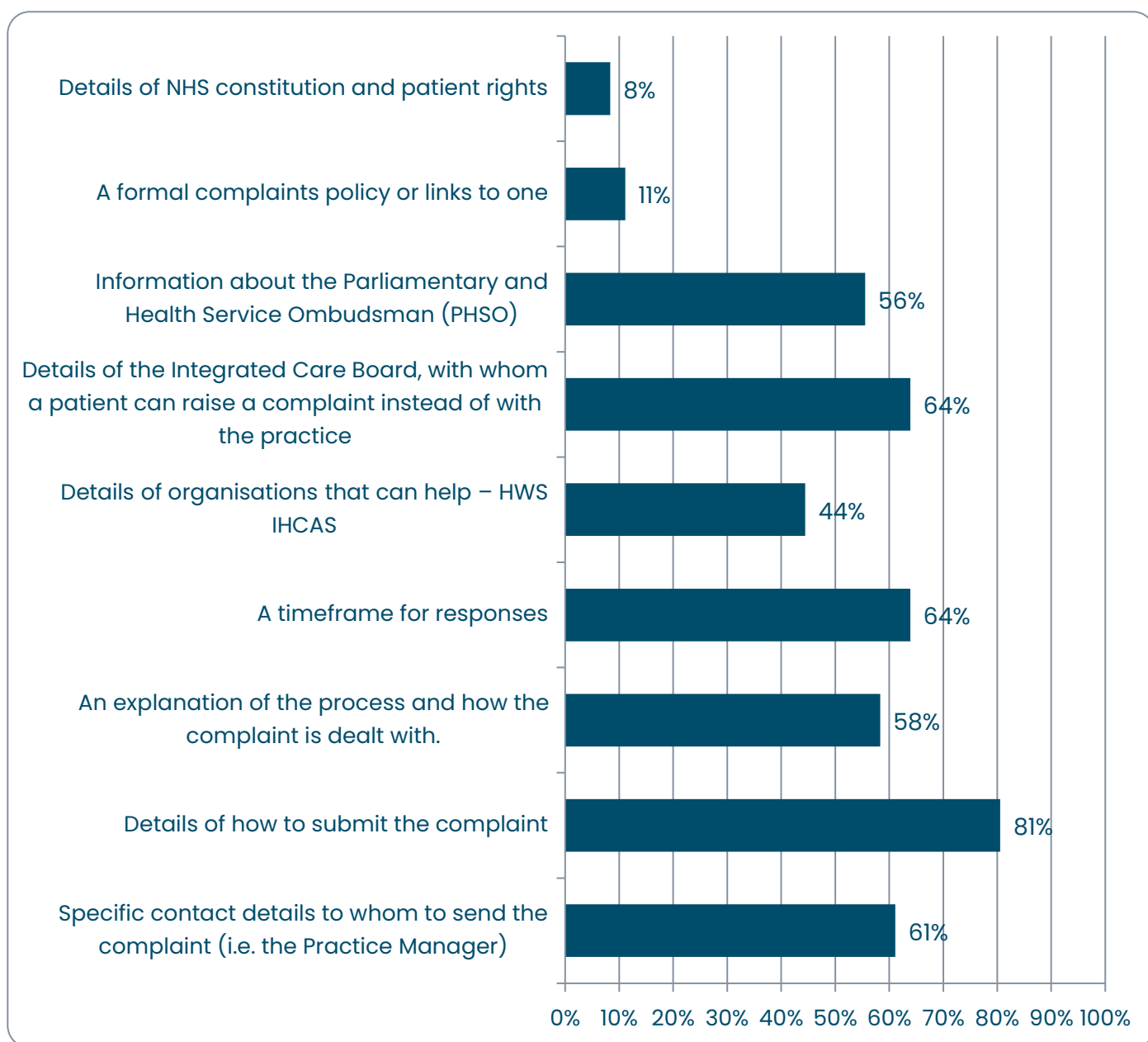


Other included:

- Side bar, Further information, Practice Policies
- Found within the 'Practice Information' tab across the top of the page, then within the 'Practice Policies' icon, then within the 'suggestion & Complaints' icon, then there is the option to access the 'Complaints Form'.
- Patient feedback page

- Via Services tab
- Patient experience centre
- Via search bar
- Under the 'About the surgery' heading in the main menu and via the search bar
- Found within 'Our Practice' which is in the main menu across the top of the page.
- located down the right-hand side of the home screen.

What does the information contain?



Only one practice website contained all of the information listed above and only five contained all of the core information, i.e. all the elements except a formal policy and details of the NHS constitution and patient rights.

How is the information presented?

We found that 22 of the 36 practices, that had information on their website, presented that information they gave as part of a webpage. Fourteen (39%) used downloadable files, 8 of these used Microsoft Word documents and 6 used PDFs. It is recommended by the NHS that only web content is used;

“Use of PDFs and office documents

PDFs and other office documents do not meet the same level of accessibility as well-designed web content. Public sector bodies, including the NHS, should not use PDFs or office documents to communicate information, except in a few very limited circumstances, as doing so is unlawful.” [Accessibility for digital services – NHS Digital](#)

How can a complaint be lodged?

We looked at the four main channels through which patients may wish to lodge a complaint:

- email
- verbally, by telephone or in person
- in writing by letter
- via an online form

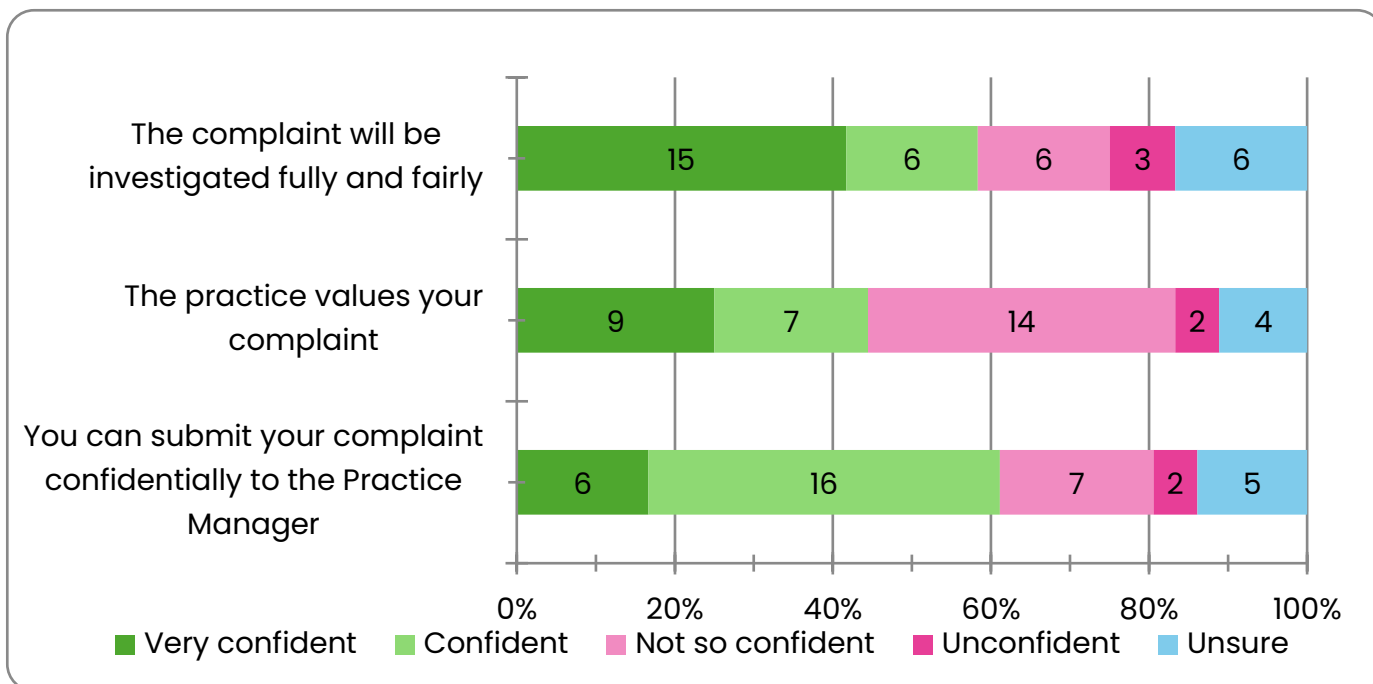
The majority of practices accept complaints through a combination of channels. The most commonly offered channel is in writing (54%). Eight practices (22%) indicate that they will accept a complaint verbally, via email or by letter.

However, 7 practices (19%) give no clear indication of how to lodge a complaint. One of these does tell patients that further information is available at reception, presumably the patient has to visit the practice and ask staff which may be off putting, particularly in this scenario where the complaint involves the reception systems.

Seven practices (19%) only provide an online form with no other information about alternative channels of communication through which they would accept a complaint.

Seven practices (19%) indicate that they will only accept a complaint ‘in writing’. They give no email address so presumably via a letter.

From the information on the website how confident do you feel that:



This was a subjective measure of confidence based on the information available, the tone of the language used and the ease of finding the information.

Recommendations

We recommend that all practices revisit the information regarding formal complaints on their websites and ensure that:

- Information on how to make a formal complaint can be found quickly and easily on websites
- Information includes contact details for **Healthwatch Shropshire** who provide the Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service for people living in Shropshire or using Shropshire NHS services
- The contact details for NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin are included as the commissioner of the service and it is clear that patients can make their complaint to them if they prefer.
- Information includes how to make a complaint and should allow for more than one communication channel. Patients should be able to make complaints verbally:
 - “You can make a complaint verbally, in writing or by email. If you make your complaint verbally, a record of your complaint will be made and you'll be provided with a written copy.” [How to complain to the NHS - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

- Information on making a complaint is included on a main page within the website rather than as a separate document in Word or PDF format.
- Contact details and service information for the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman (PHSO) are included.

Practice Websites

- Albrighton Medical Practice
- Alveley Medical Practice
- The Beeches Medical Practice
- Belvidere Medical Practice
- Bishops Castle Medical Practice
- Bridgnorth & Highley Medical Practice
- Broseley Medical Practice
- Brown Clee Medical Practice
- Cambrian Medical Centre
- Caxton Surgery
- Church Stretton Medical Practice
- Churchmere Medical Group
- Claremont Bank Surgery
- Cleobury Mortimer Medical Centre
- Clive Surgery
- Craven Arms Medical Practice
- Drayton Medical Practice
- Hodnet Medical Centre
- Knockin Medical Centre
- Marden Medical Practice
- Marysville Medical Practice
- The Meadows Medical Practice
- Much Wenlock & Cressage Medical Practice
- Mytton Oak Surgery
- Plas Ffynnon Medical Centre
- Pontesbury and Worthen Medical Practice

- Portcullis Surgery
- Prescott Surgery
- Radbrook Green Surgery
- Riverside Medical Practice
- Severn Fields Medical Practice
- Shawbury Medical Practice
- Shifnal & Priorslee Medical Practice
- South Hermitage Surgery
- Station Drive Surgery
- Wem & Prees Medical Practice
- Westbury Medical Centre



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