



What do people want?

Introduction

When people come to make a complaint and seek the support of an advocate, they will want a variety of outcomes and have a range of needs in how they want to achieve those outcomes.

The skill of the advocate is to understand and establish early on in the relationship what these are.

The type of support people seek can be broadly broken down into three groups:

1. those who need information and self help
2. those who need a little bit of practical support
3. those who need significant or intense support

Type of support

Most people who approach complaint advocacy services want some support to make the complaint (or understand the process). They may be very happy to do this by themselves but want some guidance or hand holding through the process.

We tend to see this as providing support for self help - or self advocacy.

Your advocacy service is likely to have dedicated resources to enable this to happen.

Resources and support are most likely to include:

- information about the process
- guidance on how to write a good complaint
- guidance on working out what the person wants from the complaint
- information about what the person might expect
- example templates for writing letters

Self help, self advocacy

It is worth checking out resources that are publicly available from a number of complaint advocacy providers. Take a look at these:



A little bit of help

Some people need a bit more advocacy support than just resources for self help. They might need the advocate to spend time going through options, explaining processes and the different routes. They might also want the advocate to spend some time helping to write or compose letters and work out what they might want from the complaint.

A lot of help

Other people might need more intensive support. This could be because they are in particularly vulnerable situations or because the complaint is very complex.

For instance if a person's complaint is about the potentially unlawful death of a loved one, they are likely to be experiencing numbness, grief, shock, anger, confusion - and maybe all of these strong emotions all together at the same time. They are going to need a compassionate but focused advocate who can help make sense of these feelings.

They are also likely to embark upon a complicated process involving investigation, inquiry and possibly inquest. They may need specialist legal advice in addition to the advocacy.

The level of support is unlikely to be met through self help resources and will require ongoing and intensive support.

A lot of help

The more intensive support is likely to include:

Composing letters - helping to write the letter, structure the complaint

Using the law - thinking about any legal rights or duties to investigate, share information etc

Attending meetings - physically being present, in the room 'to have the persons back'

Digesting and understanding responses - working out what responses mean and the implications of the response

Planning next steps - working out what options the person has and which ones they would like to pursue

Accessing specialist support - for instance specialist lawyers.

Outcomes from the complaint

what do people want

Acknowledging what happened

Most people who complain about their NHS care or treatment want an acknowledgment that something went wrong.

It is essential that as an advocate you appreciate the significance of this outcome where a person identifies this is something they want. Receiving an acknowledgment is an important part of dealing with traumatic events - some of which will have irreversible consequences and life changing effects.

Being able to ask and receive an acknowledgment that something went wrong, or something happened that shouldn't have, can be a profoundly powerful action.

An apology

Receiving an apology often accompanies the request for an acknowledgment that something went wrong.

A sincere apology often goes a huge way in repairing significant pain and fallout when harm has been caused. It is true that some people seek and want financial compensation, but most people are much more interested in receiving an apology which is part of the process of receiving an acknowledgment of what happened.

"I'm sorry"

Truth and candour

Very often a complaint is about getting answers to questions. The person may feel that they were unfairly treated, not given appropriate treatment, or perhaps refused treatment.

It may only be once they are able to write a formal complaint letter, or to sit down in a Local Resolution meeting that they are able to get a full explanation, which may include valid reasons for not providing a certain treatment that the patient expected.

Truth and candour

The reality for many complainants is that they feel lied to, misled and gaslighted from the moment they raise concerns. This experience has been witnessed in numerous reports and inquiries (from Mid Staffs to Mazars).

You may find people want to specifically reference the Duty of Candour professionals have to be open and honest when things have gone wrong.

As an advocate, you must be committed to supporting people to find truth and candour - and be prepared that this may involve hearing very difficult and painful information. Your role here is to walk compassionately alongside the person whilst fighting for the truth.

Knowing it won't happen again

Part of the resolution of a complaint is having a sense that the organisation, individual or team has learnt lessons and put into place systems or different ways of working that means other people will not have to go through, experience or suffer what they have suffered.

As an advocate you may want to support your partner to consider what this means or looks like. For instance do they want evidence of what has changed or a promise to do things differently.

Staff attitude

A high proportion of complaints are about staff attitude. Patients sometimes feel that NHS staff have been rude or disrespectful. Whilst most people will accept that NHS staff are very busy, impoliteness and lack of courtesy or dignity is not excusable.

Often it takes a complaint for a person to realise what they have done, or how they have acted. In this outcome you may want to explore whether it is enough for the member of staff to be informed of the impact of their behaviour or whether they want more formal action (which may be outside of the remit of the complaint process).

And everything else!

Remember that as an advocate you will be responding to individual people with individual goals and outcomes. You need to be adaptable and flexible to respond to their goals and outcomes!

Be flexible!

Be adaptable!

Thank you for reading.
Please return to the
e-learning for the next
section of learning

