

NHS Constitution – Interactive version

This interactive version of the NHS Constitution is designed to help you navigate through all of the supporting information that you may need when reading the NHS Constitution. It consists of the following documents:

[1. The NHS Constitution](#)

This Constitution establishes the **principles** and **values** of the NHS in England. It sets out **rights** to which patients, public and staff are entitled, and **pledges** which the NHS is committed to achieve, together with **responsibilities** which the public, patients and staff owe to one another to ensure that the NHS operates fairly and effectively.


[2. The Handbook to the NHS Constitution](#)

This Handbook is designed to give NHS staff and patients all the information they need about the NHS Constitution for England. It outlines the roles we all have to play in protecting and developing the NHS and will help you understand your rights, pledges, values and responsibilities.

[3. The Statement of NHS Accountability](#)

The NHS Constitution commits the Government to providing a statement of NHS accountability which describes the system of responsibility and accountability for taking decisions in the NHS. The statement of NHS accountability also provides a summary of the current structure and functions of the NHS in England.

[4. Glossary of terms](#)

By using this interactive NHS Constitution, you should be able to find the information that you need more easily. Throughout the NHS Constitution you will find this symbol  which indicates that there is more information available to you on, for example, a particular right, pledge or responsibility.

Once you have navigated away from the NHS Constitution to another document, you can go back at any point by following the underlined links.

This interactive version of the NHS Constitution is based on the documents published on the 21 January 2009.



THE NHS CONSTITUTION

the NHS belongs to us all

for England
21 January 2009

The NHS belongs to the people.

It is there to improve our health and well-being, supporting us to keep mentally and physically well, to get better when we are ill and, when we cannot fully recover, to stay as well as we can to the end of our lives. It works at the limits of science – bringing the highest levels of human knowledge and skill to save lives and improve health. It touches our lives at times of basic human need, when care and compassion are what matter most.

The NHS is founded on a common set of principles and values that bind together the communities and people it serves – patients and public – and the staff who work for it.

This Constitution establishes the **principles** and **values** of the NHS in England. It sets out **rights** to which patients, public and staff are entitled, and **pledges** which the NHS is committed to achieve, together with **responsibilities** which the public, patients and staff owe to one another to ensure that the NHS operates fairly and effectively. All NHS bodies and private and third sector providers supplying NHS services will be required by law to take account of this Constitution in their decisions and actions.

The Constitution will be renewed every 10 years, with the involvement of the public, patients and staff. It will be accompanied by the [Handbook to the NHS Constitution](#), to be renewed at least every three years, setting out current guidance on the rights, pledges, duties and responsibilities established by the Constitution. These requirements for renewal will be made legally binding. They will guarantee that the principles and values which underpin the NHS are subject to regular review and recommitment; and that any government which seeks to alter the principles or values of the NHS, or the rights, pledges, duties and responsibilities set out in this Constitution, will have to engage in a full and transparent debate with the public, patients and staff.

Click here to go to the Handbook

Click here for further information on the principles

1. Principles that guide the NHS

Seven key [principles](#) guide the NHS in all it does. They are underpinned by core NHS values which have been derived from extensive discussions with staff, patients and the public. These values are set out at the back of this document.

1. The NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all irrespective of gender, race, disability, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief. It has a duty to each and every individual that it serves and must respect their human rights. At the same time, it has a wider social duty to promote equality through the services it provides and to pay particular attention to groups or sections of society where improvements in health and life expectancy are not keeping pace with the rest of the population.

2. Access to NHS services is based on clinical need, not an individual's ability to pay. NHS services are free of charge, except in limited circumstances sanctioned by Parliament.

3. The NHS aspires to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism – in the provision of high-quality care that is safe, effective and focused on patient experience; in the planning and delivery of the clinical and other services it provides; in the people it employs and the education, training and development they receive; in the leadership and management of its organisations; and through its commitment to innovation and to the promotion and conduct of research to improve the current and future health and care of the population.

4. NHS services must reflect the needs and preferences of patients, their families and their carers. Patients, with their families and carers, where appropriate, will be involved in and consulted on all decisions about their care and treatment.

5. The NHS works across organisational boundaries and in partnership with other organisations in the interest of patients, local communities and the wider population. The NHS is an integrated system of organisations and services bound together by the principles and values now reflected in the Constitution. The NHS is committed to working jointly with local authorities and a wide range of other private, public and third sector organisations at national and local level to provide and deliver improvements in health and well-being.

6. The NHS is committed to providing best value for taxpayers' money and the most effective, fair and sustainable use of finite resources. Public funds for healthcare will be devoted solely to the benefit of the people that the NHS serves.

7. The NHS is accountable to the public, communities and patients that it serves. The NHS is a national service funded through national taxation, and it is the Government which sets the framework for the NHS and which is accountable to Parliament for its operation. However, most decisions in the NHS, especially those about the treatment of individuals and the detailed organisation of services, are rightly taken by the local NHS and by patients with their clinicians. The system of responsibility and accountability for taking decisions in the NHS should be transparent and clear to the public, patients and staff. The Government will ensure that there is always a clear and up-to-date [statement of NHS accountability](#) for this purpose.

Click here to go to the Statement of Accountability





2a. Patients and the public – your rights and NHS pledges to you


Everyone who uses the NHS should understand what legal rights they have. For this reason, important legal rights are summarised in this Constitution and explained in more detail in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution, which also explains what you can do if you think you have not received what is rightfully yours. This summary does not alter the content of your legal rights.

The Constitution also contains pledges that the NHS is committed to achieve. Pledges go above and beyond legal rights. This means that pledges are not legally binding but represent a commitment by the NHS to provide high quality services.




Click here for further information and what to do if you have a concern about any of the rights or pledges

Access to health services:

-  **You have the right** to receive NHS services free of charge, apart from certain limited exceptions sanctioned by Parliament.
-  **You have the right** to access NHS services. You will not be refused access on unreasonable grounds.
-  **You have the right** to expect your local NHS to assess the health requirements of the local community and to commission and put in place the services to meet those needs as considered necessary.
-  **You have the right**, in certain circumstances, to go to other European Economic Area countries or Switzerland for treatment which would be available to you through your NHS commissioner.



 **You have the right** not to be unlawfully discriminated against in the provision of NHS services including on grounds of gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability (including learning disability or mental illness) or age.¹

The NHS also commits:



-  • to provide convenient, easy access to services within the waiting times set out in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution (pledge);
-  • to make decisions in a clear and transparent way, so that patients and the public can understand how services are planned and delivered (pledge); and
-  • to make the transition as smooth as possible when you are referred between services, and to include you in relevant discussions (pledge).

¹ The Government intends to use the Equality Bill to make unjustifiable age discrimination against adults unlawful in the provision of services and exercise of public functions. Subject to Parliamentary approval, this right not to be discriminated against will extend to age when the relevant provisions are brought into force for the health sector.



Quality of care and environment:

-  **You have the right** to be treated with a professional standard of care, by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, in a properly approved or registered organisation that meets required levels of safety and quality.²
-  **You have the right** to expect NHS organisations to monitor, and make efforts to improve, the quality of healthcare they commission or provide.


The NHS also commits:

-  • to ensure that services are provided in a clean and safe environment that is fit for purpose, based on national best practice (pledge); and
-  • to continuous improvement in the quality of services you receive, identifying and sharing best practice in quality of care and treatments (pledge).


Nationally approved treatments, drugs and programmes:

-  **You have the right** to drugs and treatments that have been recommended by NICE³ for use in the NHS, if your doctor says they are clinically appropriate for you.
-  **You have the right** to expect local decisions on funding of other drugs



and treatments to be made rationally following a proper consideration of the evidence. If the local NHS decides not to fund a drug or treatment you and your doctor feel would be right for you, they will explain that decision to you.

 **You have the right** to receive the vaccinations that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommends that you should receive under an NHS-provided national immunisation programme.

The NHS also commits:

-  • to provide screening programmes as recommended by the UK National Screening Committee (pledge).


Respect, consent and confidentiality:


-  **You have the right** to be treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with your human rights.
-  **You have the right** to accept or refuse treatment that is offered to you, and not to be given any physical examination or treatment unless you have given valid consent. If you do not have the capacity to do so, consent must be obtained from a person legally able to act on your behalf, or the treatment must be in your best interests.⁴


² The registration system will apply to some NHS providers in respect of infection control from 2009, and more broadly from 2010. Further detail is set out in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution.

³ NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) is an independent NHS organisation producing guidance on drugs and treatments. 'Recommended' means recommended by a NICE technology appraisal. Primary care trusts are normally obliged to fund NICE technology appraisals from a date no later than three months from the publication of the appraisal.


⁴ If you are detained in hospital or on supervised community treatment under the Mental Health Act 1983 different rules may apply to treatment for your mental disorder. These rules will be explained to you at the time. They may mean that you can be given treatment for your mental disorder even though you do not consent.

 **You have the right** to be given information about your proposed treatment in advance, including any significant risks and any alternative treatments which may be available, and the risks involved in doing nothing.


 **You have the right** to privacy and confidentiality and to expect the NHS to keep your confidential information safe and secure.


 **You have the right** of access to your own health records. These will always be used to manage your treatment in your best interests.

The NHS also commits:

-  • to share with you any letters sent between clinicians about your care (pledge).



Informed choice:

 **You have the right** to choose your GP practice, and to be accepted by that practice unless there are reasonable grounds to refuse, in which case you will be informed of those reasons.


 **You have the right** to express a preference for using a particular doctor within your GP practice, and for the practice to try to comply.


 **You have the right** to make choices about your NHS care and to information to support these choices. The options available to you will develop over time and depend on your individual needs. Details are set out in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution.

The NHS also commits:



-  • to inform you about the healthcare services available to you, locally and nationally (pledge); and
-  • to offer you easily accessible, reliable and relevant information to enable you to participate fully in your own healthcare decisions and to support you in making choices. This will include information on the quality of clinical services where there is robust and accurate information available (pledge).

Involvement in your healthcare and in the NHS:


 **You have the right** to be involved in discussions and decisions about your healthcare, and to be given information to enable you to do this.


 **You have the right** to be involved, directly or through representatives, in the planning of healthcare services, the development and consideration of proposals for changes in the way those services are provided, and in decisions to be made affecting the operation of those services.


The NHS also commits:


-  • to provide you with the information you need to influence and scrutinise the planning and delivery of NHS services (pledge); and
-  • to work in partnership with you, your family, carers and representatives (pledge).


Complaint and redress:

 **You have the right** to have any complaint you make about NHS services dealt with efficiently and to have it properly investigated.




 **You have the right** to know the outcome of any investigation into your complaint.

 **You have the right** to take your complaint to the independent Health Service Ombudsman, if you are not satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the NHS.

 **You have the right** to make a claim for judicial review if you think you have been directly affected by an unlawful act or decision of an NHS body.



 **You have the right** to compensation where you have been harmed by negligent treatment.

The NHS also commits:

-  • to ensure you are treated with courtesy and you receive appropriate support throughout the handling of a complaint; and the fact that you have complained will not adversely affect your future treatment (pledge);
-  • when mistakes happen, to acknowledge them, apologise, explain what went wrong and put things right quickly and effectively (pledge); and
-  • to ensure that the organisation learns lessons from complaints and claims and uses these to improve NHS services (pledge).

2b. Patients and the public – your responsibilities

The NHS belongs to all of us. There are things that we can all do for ourselves and for one another to help it work effectively, and to ensure resources are used responsibly:

-  **You should recognise** that you can make a significant contribution to your own, and your family's, good health and well-being, and take some personal responsibility for it.
-  **You should register with a GP practice** – the main point of access to NHS care.
-  **You should treat NHS staff and other patients with respect** and recognise that causing a nuisance or disturbance on NHS premises could result in prosecution.
-  **You should provide** accurate information about your health, condition and status.
-  **You should keep appointments,** or cancel within reasonable time. Receiving treatment within the maximum waiting times may be compromised unless you do.
-  **You should follow the course of treatment** which you have agreed, and talk to your clinician if you find this difficult.
-  **You should participate** in important public health programmes such as vaccination.
-  **You should ensure** that those closest to you are aware of your wishes about organ donation.
-  **You should give feedback** – both positive and negative – about the treatment and care you have received, including any adverse reactions you may have had.

3a. Staff – your rights and NHS pledges to you

It is the commitment, professionalism and dedication of staff working for the benefit of the people the NHS serves which really make the difference. High quality care requires high quality workplaces, with commissioners and providers aiming to be employers of choice.






Click here for more information on the staff section of the handbook and if you have any concerns about the rights, pledges, duties and expectations


All staff should have rewarding and worthwhile jobs, with the freedom and confidence to act in the interest of patients. To do this, they need to be trusted and actively listened to. They must be treated with respect at work, have the tools, training and support to deliver care, and opportunities to develop and progress.

The Constitution applies to all staff, doing clinical or non-clinical NHS work, and their employers. It covers staff wherever they are working, whether in public, private or third sector organisations.

Staff have extensive **legal rights**, embodied in general employment and discrimination law. These are summarised in the Handbook to the NHS Constitution. In addition, individual contracts of employment contain terms and conditions giving staff further rights.





The rights are there to help ensure that staff:

-  • have a good working environment with flexible working opportunities, consistent with the needs of patients and with the way that people live their lives;
-  • have a fair pay and contract framework;
-  • can be involved and represented in the workplace;
-  • have healthy and safe working conditions and an environment free from harassment, bullying or violence;
-  • are treated fairly, equally and free from discrimination; and

-  • can raise an internal grievance and if necessary seek redress, where it is felt that a right has not been upheld.

In addition to these legal rights, there are a number of **pledges**, which the NHS is committed to achieve. Pledges go above and beyond your legal rights. This means that they are not legally binding but represent a commitment by the NHS to provide high-quality working environments for staff.







The NHS commits:

-  • to provide all staff with clear roles and responsibilities and rewarding jobs for teams and individuals that make a difference to patients, their families and carers and communities (pledge);
-  • to provide all staff with personal development, access to appropriate training for their jobs and line management support to succeed (pledge);
-  • to provide support and opportunities for staff to maintain their health, well-being and safety (pledge); and
-  • to engage staff in decisions that affect them and the services they provide, individually, through representative organisations and through local partnership working arrangements. All staff will be empowered to put forward ways to deliver better and safer services for patients and their families (pledge).

3b. Staff – your responsibilities






All staff have responsibilities to the public, their patients and colleagues.

Important legal duties are summarised below.

-  **You have a duty** to accept professional accountability and maintain the standards of professional practice as set by the appropriate regulatory body applicable to your profession or role.
-  **You have a duty** to take reasonable care of health and safety at work for you, your team and others, and to co-operate with employers to ensure compliance with health and safety requirements.
-  **You have a duty** to act in accordance with the express and implied terms of your contract of employment.
-  **You have a duty** not to discriminate against patients or staff and to adhere to equal opportunities and equality and human rights legislation.
-  **You have a duty** to protect the confidentiality of personal information that you hold unless to do so would put anyone at risk of significant harm.
-  **You have a duty** to be honest and truthful in applying for a job and in carrying out that job.

The Constitution also includes **expectations** that reflect how staff should play their part in ensuring the success of the NHS and delivering high-quality care.

You should aim:

-  • to maintain the highest standards of care and service, taking responsibility not only for the care you personally provide, but also for your wider contribution to the aims of your team and the NHS as a whole;
-  • to take up training and development opportunities provided over and above those legally required of your post;
-  • to play your part in sustainably improving services by working in partnership with patients, the public and communities;
-  • to be open with patients, their families, carers or representatives, including if anything goes wrong; welcoming and listening to feedback and addressing concerns promptly and in a spirit of co-operation. You should contribute to a climate where the truth can be heard and the reporting of, and learning from, errors is encouraged; and
-  • to view the services you provide from the standpoint of a patient, and involve patients, their families and carers in the services you provide, working with them, their communities and other organisations, and making it clear who is responsible for their care.

NHS values

Patients, public and staff have helped develop this expression of values that inspire passion in the NHS and should guide it in the 21st century. Individual organisations will develop and refresh their own values, tailored to their local needs. The NHS values provide common ground for co operation to achieve shared aspirations.

[Click here for further information on the values](#)

Respect and dignity. We value each person as an individual, respect their aspirations and commitments in life, and seek to understand their priorities, needs, abilities and limits. We take what others have to say seriously. We are honest about our point of view and what we can and cannot do.

Commitment to quality of care. We earn the trust placed in us by insisting on quality and striving to get the basics right every time: safety, confidentiality, professional and managerial integrity, accountability, dependable service and good communication. We welcome feedback, learn from our mistakes and build on our successes.

Compassion. We respond with humanity and kindness to each person's pain, distress, anxiety or need. We search for the things we can do, however small, to give comfort and relieve suffering. We find time for those we serve and work alongside. We do not wait to be asked, because we care.

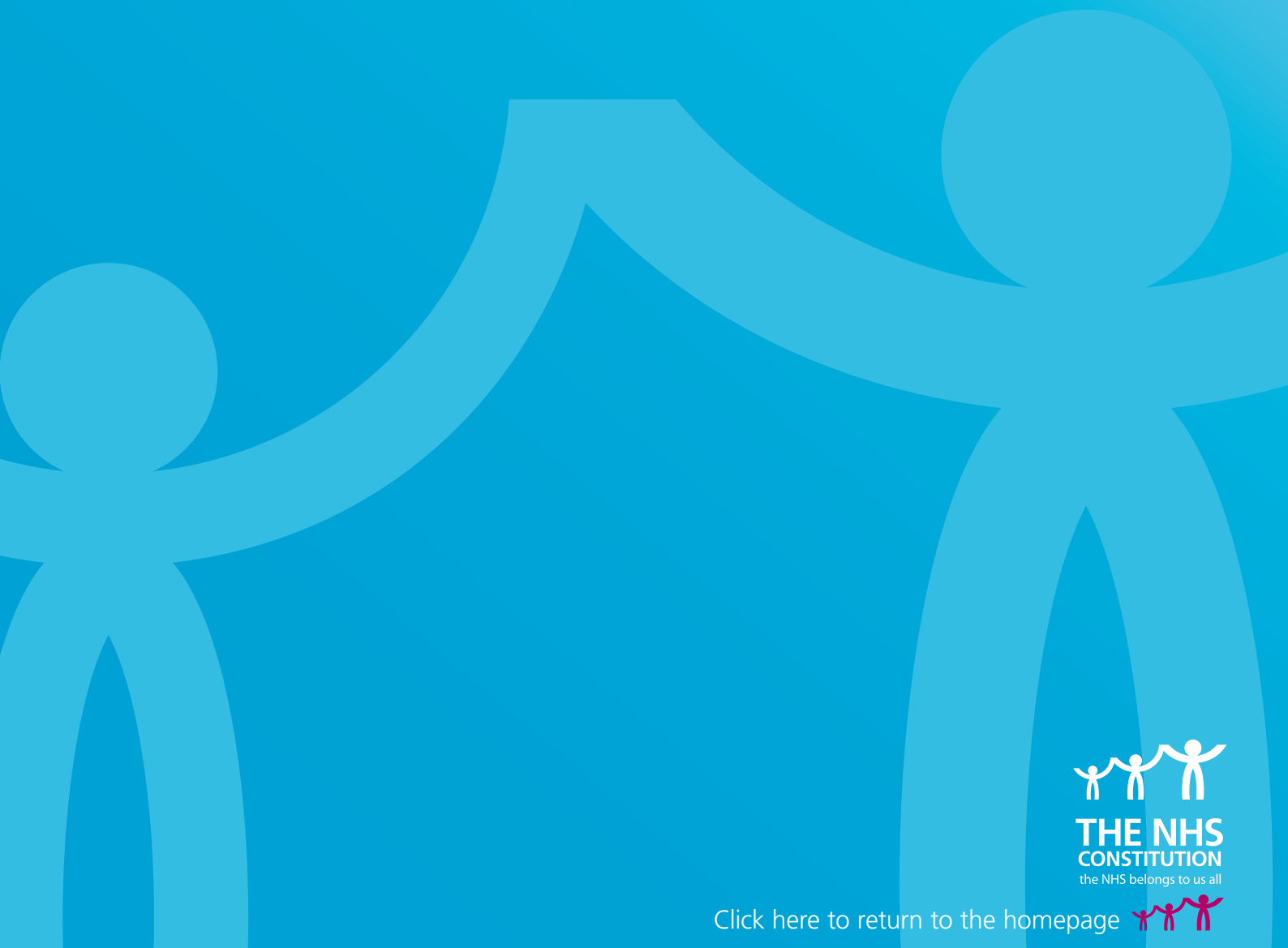
Improving lives. We strive to improve health and well-being and people's experiences of the NHS. We value excellence and professionalism wherever we find it – in the everyday things that make people's lives better as much as in clinical practice, service improvements and innovation.

Working together for patients. We put patients first in everything we do, by reaching out to staff, patients, carers, families, communities, and professionals outside the NHS. We put the needs of patients and communities before organisational boundaries.

Everyone counts. We use our resources for the benefit of the whole community, and make sure nobody is excluded or left behind. We accept that some people need more help, that difficult decisions have to be taken – and that when we waste resources we waste others' opportunities. We recognise that we all have a part to play in making ourselves and our communities healthier.

THE HANDBOOK TO The NHS Constitution

for England
21 January 2009



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Overview

This Handbook is designed to give NHS staff and patients all the information they need about the NHS Constitution for England. It outlines the roles we all have to play in protecting and developing the NHS and will help you understand our rights, pledges, values and responsibilities.

The first part of the Handbook (starting from [page 8](#)) is a guide to the patients' rights and pledges contained in the Constitution, and can be used for reference to explain what the Constitution means for patients. It also sets out the responsibilities of patients and the public in working with NHS staff.

The second part of the Handbook (starting from [page 70](#)) is for staff involved in providing NHS services and covers the pledges the NHS has made to staff to help them deliver better quality care and to make the NHS a better place to work. It is clear about the expectations the NHS has of its staff and their rights as employees.

At the back of this Handbook is an appendix outlining the legal sources of both the patient and staff rights in the NHS Constitution. This is followed by a glossary of terms.

What will the NHS Constitution do?

The aim of the Constitution is to protect and renew the enduring principles of the NHS. It empowers staff, patients and the public by setting out existing legal rights and pledges for the first time in one place and in clear and simple language. The Constitution also sets out clear expectations about the behaviours and values of all organisations providing NHS care.

How the Constitution was developed

The Constitution was developed as part of the NHS Next Stage Review led by Lord Darzi. To help ensure that the Constitution would be meaningful and enduring, it was based on evidence of what matters to patients, the public and NHS staff.

There was an extensive development and research process. This involved talking to patients, the public and staff, discussion events with stakeholders, and getting ideas from experts and think tanks.

A draft of the Constitution was published for consultation on 30 June 2008. The consultation process extended this conversation about the Constitution wider still, with over 1,000 direct responses to the Department of Health, and a wide range of consultation activity at a local level in the NHS allowing thousands of people to take part in the discussion.

A Constitutional Advisory Forum, made up of a number of leading experts and stakeholders, was set up to oversee the consultation process. The Forum was asked to produce a report for the Secretary of State for Health at the end of the consultation. Published in December 2008 as *The National Health Constitution: Report of the Constitutional Advisory Forum to the Secretary of State for Health*, it summarised the reflections of Forum members who had attended consultation events, and received formal representation from groups and organisations on their thoughts about the Constitution. It also summarised the findings of the consultation exercises within the NHS, which were overseen by strategic health authorities.

The NHS Constitution was published on 21 January 2009 and applies to NHS services in England.

The Constitutional Advisory Forum's report and the Government's response to the consultation can be found at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_091768.

What is in the Constitution?

The Constitution contains the following elements:

- a short **overview**, which outlines the purpose of the NHS and of the Constitution;
- the **principles** of the NHS, which are the enduring high-level 'rules' that govern the way that the NHS operates, and define how it seeks to achieve its purpose; these build on previous versions of NHS principles, including those set out in *The NHS Plan (2000)*;
- NHS **values** which have been developed by patients, public and staff, are the values that inspire passion in the NHS and should guide it in the 21st century; individual organisations will develop and refresh their own values, tailored to their local needs, so the NHS values provide the common ground for co-operation to achieve shared aspirations;
- **rights and pledges** for patients and the public, as well as their **responsibilities**; and
- **rights and pledges** for staff, as well as their **responsibilities**.

Rights and pledges

One of the primary aims of the Constitution is to set out clearly what patients, the public and staff can expect from the NHS and what the NHS expects from them in return. The Constitution distinguishes between:

Your rights

A right is a legal entitlement protected by law. The Constitution sets out a number of rights, which include rights conferred explicitly by law and rights derived from legal obligations imposed on NHS bodies and other healthcare providers. The Constitution brings together these rights in one place but it does not create or replace them.

You'll find a description of the legal basis of each right in the appendix to this Handbook. For information on what each right means for patients and staff, see the relevant sections of the Handbook.

Pledges

This Constitution also contains pledges which the NHS is committed to achieve, supported by its management and regulatory systems. The pledges are not legally binding and cannot be guaranteed for everyone all of the time, because they express an ambition to improve, going above and beyond legal rights.

This Handbook explains in detail what each of the pledges means and current actions to meet them. Some of the pledges, such as those relating to waiting times for treatment, are long-standing commitments on which the NHS already has a track record of success and strong mechanisms in place to ensure delivery. In other areas, the pledges refer to relatively new commitments that the NHS is working towards achieving.

Responsibilities

The Constitution sets out expectations of how patients, the public and staff can help the NHS work effectively and ensure that finite resources are used fairly. This Handbook gives further information on those responsibilities.

Who does the Constitution apply to?

The rights and responsibilities in the Constitution generally apply to everyone who is entitled to receive NHS services and to NHS staff.

In some other cases, there are further specific rules that apply. In particular, there are different rules for children, people who lack mental capacity, and patients detained under mental health legislation, which this Handbook describes.

How will the NHS Constitution make a difference?

For the Constitution to succeed in its aims, it needs to become part of everyday life in the NHS for patients, the public and staff. Achieving this will require leadership, partnership and sustained commitment over months and years, to raise awareness of the Constitution and weave it into the way the NHS works at all levels. Publishing the Constitution is only the first step in the journey.

What legal underpinning will the Constitution have?

The Government has brought new legislation before Parliament to help ensure that the Constitution endures and makes a lasting difference. The Health Bill, introduced in Parliament on 15 January 2009, proposes that:

1. All NHS organisations, as well as third sector and independent organisations providing NHS care, should be legally required to take account of the NHS Constitution in performing their NHS functions.
2. The Government should be legally required to:
 - a. Ensure that the NHS Constitution continues to be available to patients, staff and members of the public, and to carry out a review of the whole Constitution at least every 10 years, with the involvement of patients, public, staff and organisations involved in providing NHS services.
 - b. Ensure that this Handbook to the NHS Constitution continues to be available to patients, staff and members of the public, and that it is reviewed at least once every three years. In practice, it is expected that these updates will occur more frequently. The Handbook contains the detail of what the commitments in the Constitution mean. Updating the Handbook regularly will allow many of the commitments to evolve over time, within the enduring framework of the Constitution itself.
 - c. Produce a report every three years on how the NHS Constitution has affected patients, staff and members of the public.

The Constitution is a 'declaratory document', articulating existing rights and responsibilities in one place. Subject to Parliamentary approval, the new legal duties are expected to come into force in the autumn of 2009.

An explanation of the Health Bill can be found at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Legislation/Actsandbills/DH_093280.

Where does the Constitution apply?

The core principles of the NHS are shared across all parts of the United Kingdom. However, the NHS Constitution applies only to the NHS in England. The devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are responsible for developing their own health policies.

What to do if your expectations are not met

The NHS welcomes and encourages feedback (both positive and negative) from patients, the public and NHS staff. This is a vital source of information and will help the NHS to improve.

If patients want to raise concerns, the first step is to contact their clinician or the local NHS (primary care trust) to see if the concern can be resolved immediately. In relation to staff concerns, NHS staff should first contact their line manager to see if they can find a solution. Details of what to do if you want to raise a concern are given on [pages 10–11](#) and [58–63](#) for patients and from [page 70](#) for staff.

The Handbook is intended to be a living document, providing information about the NHS Constitution. The Department of Health would welcome your feedback on the content. Please contact:

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Part I: Patients and the public

Introduction

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

The pledges and rights for patients and the public are set out in detail on the following pages, which cover the seven key areas of the NHS Constitution:

- rights and pledges covering **access to health services**;
- rights and pledges covering **quality of care and environment**;
- rights and pledges covering **nationally approved treatments, drugs and programmes**;
- rights and pledges covering **respect, consent and confidentiality**;
- rights and pledges covering **informed choice**;
- rights and pledges covering **involvement in your healthcare and in the NHS**; and
- rights and pledges covering **complaints and redress**.

The NHS would like to hear your feedback (both positive and negative), as it helps the NHS to improve and respond to your needs effectively.

If you think that a right has not been upheld or the NHS is not meeting its commitments, the NHS would like to hear from you. In the first instance, you should speak to your clinician or local NHS (your primary care trust, or PCT) to see if your concern can be resolved immediately.

If you feel you need further help

- You, your family or someone you have asked on your behalf can feed back directly at the **point of care**, either to the clinician providing care or through the local Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS). PALS are available in most hospitals and PCTs, and act on behalf of their service users when handling patient and family concerns. They liaise with staff, managers and, where appropriate, other relevant organisations, to negotiate speedy solutions and to help bring about changes to the way that services are delivered. PALS also refer patients and families to locally- or nationally-based support agencies, where appropriate. By providing a concise statement of what patients can expect from the NHS, the NHS Constitution will make it easier to raise questions and challenges directly at the point of care.
- The local **PCT** offers another route to raise questions or concerns about the application of the NHS Constitution. PCTs are responsible for services in their local area and for ensuring co-ordination between them; they can therefore be approached on any matter relating to the NHS Constitution. To find your local PCT, please contact NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk).

- The NHS also has **complaints arrangements** in place, allowing patients to raise concerns about services. Depending on the nature of the complaint, it should generally be addressed directly to the provider of the service. From April 2009, you will have the choice of making a complaint to either the service provider or the local PCT. If you are unsure whether to make a complaint locally, you may wish to discuss the matter with your local PALS or your local PCT. If you remain unhappy with the local resolution of your complaint, you can ask the **Health Service Ombudsman** to look into your case: www.ombudsman.org.uk.
- In the last resort, patients and staff can seek **legal redress** if they feel that NHS organisations have infringed the legal rights described in the NHS Constitution. For patients and the public, this could be in the form of a judicial review of the process by which an NHS organisation has reached a decision.
- For detail on the rights and pledges relating to complaints and redress in the Constitution, see [pages 58–63](#).

The Constitution is not intended to develop a ‘lawyer’s charter’. Where a mistake has been made, the NHS needs to accept something has gone wrong, to apologise for it, and to make sure it does not happen again. The Constitution seeks to encourage a more open environment that allows concerns to be resolved quickly and effectively.

Access to health services

(i) There are five rights covering access to health services:

Right

“You have the right to receive NHS services free of charge, apart from certain limited exceptions sanctioned by Parliament.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

NHS services are generally provided free of charge. This includes access to local services like your GP, hospital or clinic, so you do not have to worry about payment.

There are some exceptions: for example, some people will have to pay for prescription charges and visits to the dentist. Overseas visitors may also have to pay charges.

(Refer to page 110 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right to access NHS services. You will not be refused access on unreasonable grounds.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

NHS services will always be available for the people who need them. Remember, no one can deny you the right to access these services because of your race, religion or belief, gender, disability or sexual orientation – these are all ‘unreasonable grounds’ on which to refuse patients access. ‘Reasonable grounds’ to refuse access to the NHS include abusive or violent behaviour by the patient, for example.

Access to NHS services is not denied in situations where patients pay for additional private care separately. Further information is set out in the Government’s response to Professor Richards’s report, *Improving access to medicines for NHS patients* (2008).

If you are in the Armed Forces, your medical care will be provided by the Defence Medical Services.

(Refer to page 111 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right to expect your local NHS to assess the health requirements of the local community and to commission and put in place the services to meet those needs as considered necessary.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

This is the responsibility of your local PCT, which must assess the health requirements of the local population and provide the services as it considers necessary to meet their needs.

The NHS also provides access to ‘specialised services’ for the small number of people who suffer from rare conditions. These specialised services are commissioned either regionally or nationally from a few specialist centres, depending on the rarity of the condition or treatment.

(Refer to page 112 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right, in certain circumstances, to go to other European Economic Area countries or Switzerland for treatment which would be available to you through your NHS commissioner.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

UK patients may be able to travel to another country in the European Economic Area (EEA) or to Switzerland to receive medical treatment and either have this funded upfront or subsequently receive reimbursement from their PCT of some or all of the costs of that treatment.

The EEA consists of Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom.

Under EC Regulation 1408/71 (from 2010 EC Regulation 883/2004) where your local commissioner (usually your local PCT) agrees that you should be offered a particular treatment on the NHS and that treatment is available under an EEA country’s or Switzerland’s health system, you can ask your commissioner to recommend to the Department of Health that your health costs be met under an E112 form.

Continued overleaf

Right

What this right means for patients

The decision to authorise an E112 form is at the discretion of the Secretary of State for Health, unless your treatment is not available in the UK without 'undue delay'. If you cannot get your treatment without undue delay, an E112 form must be granted.

What constitutes 'undue delay' is determined by a clinical assessment of a medically acceptable period of time for a patient to wait for treatment. This should be considered on a case-by-case basis and be subject to ongoing review until the treatment is received.

The E112 form only covers treatment from a provider in the state system. If an E112 form is issued, you should be treated as if you are a resident of the country treating you. This means that if patients from that country in the same circumstances have to make an additional payment for particular care, so will you. If you have to make such a payment, you may request reimbursement of your costs from the NHS.

Under Article 49 of the EC treaty you may travel to an EEA country (not Switzerland) to receive treatment that you would be entitled to receive on the NHS and may request reimbursement from the NHS for some or all of the costs of this treatment.

If you seek treatment under Article 49, you are exercising a right to make a personal decision to leave the NHS and access another country's healthcare system. You will be treated under the legislation and standards of that country, though rules affecting entitlement are determined in the UK. You may be treated in either the state or private sector of that other country. You would have to pay upfront for healthcare under this route and subsequently may request reimbursement from your local commissioner (usually your PCT) for some or all of the costs of this treatment.

If you are seeking non-hospital treatment, you do not need the formal agreement of your local commissioner before travelling, though you are advised that you should discuss your plans with them in advance.

Continued overleaf

Right

What this right means for patients

If you are seeking hospital care, you should contact your local commissioner in advance to discuss obtaining prior authorisation from them before accessing healthcare and subsequently requesting reimbursement for some or all of the cost of this treatment. This will also enable you to confirm what healthcare you will be reimbursed for.

Your local commissioner should consider your request in accordance with the Department of Health guidance: 'Patient Mobility: Advice to Local Healthcare Commissioners on Handling Requests for Hospital Care in other European Countries following the ECJ's Judgment in the Watts case.' In any event, you are advised to contact your NHS commissioner before you travel to confirm what treatment they will fund.

Further information can be found at the Department of Health (www.dh.gov.uk) and the NHS Choices website (www.nhs.uk).

(Refer to page 112 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

What this right means for patients

“You have the right not to be unlawfully discriminated against in the provision of NHS services including on grounds of gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability (including learning disability or mental illness) or age.”

The Government intends to use the Equality Bill to make unjustifiable age discrimination against adults unlawful in the provision of services and exercise of public functions. Subject to Parliamentary approval, this right not to be discriminated against will extend to age when the relevant provisions are brought into force for the health sector.

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

You have the right not to be discriminated against by the NHS based on your gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or disability (that includes learning disability or mental illness).

The Government intends to use the Equality Bill to make unjustifiable age discrimination against adults unlawful in the provision of services and exercise of public functions. Subject to Parliamentary approval, this right not to be discriminated against will extend to age when the relevant provisions are brought into force for the health sector.

(Refer to page 113 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Pledge

(ii) In addition, there are three pledges covering access to health services:

“The NHS commits to provide convenient, easy access to services within the waiting times set out in this Handbook to the NHS Constitution.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

All patients should receive high-quality care without any unnecessary delay.

The NHS Operating Framework sets the priorities for the NHS over the next year and helps deliver the vision set out in *High Quality Care for All*. Within the Operating Framework, the detail behind this pledge is set out. There are strong NHS systems to ensure delivery of this pledge. Organisations that deliver prompt access to high-quality care will be rewarded by more patients choosing their services and recognition by regulators, e.g. the Care Quality Commission. Organisations' performance will be monitored across all waiting time pledges. Clear thresholds exist giving organisations clarity about what is expected of them by when and interventions should they not deliver.

From the end of December 2008, patients can expect to start their consultant-led treatment within a maximum of 18 weeks from referral for non-urgent conditions unless they choose to wait longer or it is clinically appropriate that they do so. Although the maximum is 18 weeks, many patients will receive treatment much sooner than that.

As now, patients with urgent conditions, such as cancer and heart disease, will be able to be seen and receive treatment more quickly. For example, patients referred with suspected cancer by their GP will wait a maximum of two weeks to see a specialist.

There are a number of other [government pledges on waiting times](#), including:

- a maximum two-week wait to see a specialist, currently for all patients referred with suspected cancer by their GP, extended from December 2009 to include all patients referred for investigation of breast symptoms even if cancer is not initially suspected;
- cancer patients wait no more than 31 days from decision to treat to the start of their first treatment, extended to cover all additional surgery and drug treatments (including subsequent treatments) from December 2008 and all radiotherapy and other treatments (including subsequent treatments) from December 2010;
- all patients referred with suspected cancer by their GP wait no more than 62 days from referral to treatment, is to be extended to include patients suspected of having cancer detected through national screening programmes or by hospital specialists from December 2008;
- patients wait no longer than four hours in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge;
- people can access a primary care professional within 24 hours or a primary care doctor within 48 hours;
- patients who need a revascularisation wait no longer than three months;
- a maximum two-week wait standard for Rapid Access Chest Pain Clinics;
- access to a genito-urinary medicine clinic within 48 hours of contacting a service;

Pledge

- all patients who have operations cancelled, on or after the day of admission (including the day of surgery), for non-clinical reasons to be offered another binding date within 28 days, or the patient's treatment to be funded at the time and hospital of the patient's choice;
- all ambulance trusts to respond to 75 per cent of Category A calls within eight minutes and to respond to 95 per cent of Category A calls within 19 minutes of a request being made for a fully equipped ambulance vehicle (car or ambulance) able to transport the patient in a clinically safe manner; and
- all ambulance trusts to respond to 95 per cent of Category B calls within 19 minutes.

The NHS is also working to make it easier to access NHS services at a time that is convenient to you. Extending opening hours for GP surgeries to improve access was one of the key priorities in the NHS' operational plans for 2008/09 (the 2008/09 Operating Framework). There are now over 60 per cent of GP practices offering extended opening hours. Each PCT is also establishing new GP-led health centres that will offer both walk-in access and bookable appointments for GP services for any member of the public, regardless of which local GP practice they are registered with, from 8am to 8pm, seven days a week. The majority of these centres will open during 2009.

The Operating Framework for 2009/10 makes it clear that PCTs need to continue to develop NHS dental services, with the aim of being able to provide dentistry for anyone who seeks help in accessing services. Strategic health authorities (SHAs) will be agreeing dental commissioning strategies with each PCT to achieve this objective. These plans are likely to be based on achieving the objective by or before the end of financial year 2010/11.

“The NHS commits to make decisions in a clear and transparent way, so that patients and the public can understand how services are planned and delivered.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

PCTs are responsible for involving their local populations in decisions about the local services that they commission. In addition to the legal duty on NHS organisations to involve people and their representatives in decisions about services, and on PCTs to report back publicly on how they have responded to local views, the Department of Health has introduced a comprehensive framework of policies to strengthen the local accountability of PCTs, including:

- introducing Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) to gather the views of local people and communities; and
- strengthening partnerships between the NHS and local government, and giving local councils the power to review and scrutinise local health services.

These reforms are supported by further efforts to ensure that public and patients are at the heart of local decision-making. For example, as part of the World Class Commissioning programme, which will hold PCTs to account for their performance, PCTs are required to demonstrate that they are proactively leading continuous and meaningful engagement with the public and patients to shape services and improve people's health. A new NHS planning regime is being implemented which distinguishes clearly between priorities that need to be decided nationally (in order to have consistent services across the country), and those priorities chosen locally to meet the needs of individual populations.

Pledge

“The NHS commits to make the transition as smooth as possible when you are referred between services, and to include you in relevant discussions.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Providing effectively integrated care, achieving better outcomes for service users in a cost effective way, is a key priority for the NHS. In particular, improving integration between health and social care is an important ambition, as signalled in the White Paper *Our health, our care, our say* and in *Putting People First*, the recent cross-government agreement on adult social care.

Delivery of integrated care is currently a joint responsibility of the NHS and partner organisations, such as the social services departments including local authorities. The NHS has a duty to work in partnership with local authorities to provide you with effective, integrated and personalised services to meet your health and well-being needs. The delivery of services to improve the health and well-being of the local population is agreed by the NHS and its local authority partners in a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

In addition to the legal requirements, particular efforts to improve the integration of care include the following:

- PCTs can agree a formal partnership arrangement with a local authority under regulations made under section 75 of the National Health Service Act 2006 (previously section 31 of the Health Act 1999). This agreement allows the NHS and local authorities to pool resources and/or enables one partner to provide or commission both NHS and health-related local authority services.
- The *End of Life Care Strategy* (2008) outlines a number of measures that will be put in place to help patients nearing the end of their lives to receive co-ordinated care and support, ensuring that patients' needs are met, irrespective of who is delivering the service.
- Local authorities, the NHS and other key local organisations have made improving the health and well-being of their communities a key priority in their local area agreements (LAAs). LAAs set out what issues each locality has chosen to tackle over the next three years. Local partners will be held to account for progress on those issues.

Quality of care and environment

(i) There are two rights covering quality of care and environment:

Right

“You have the right to be treated with a professional standard of care, by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, in a properly approved or registered organisation that meets required levels of safety and quality.”

The registration system will apply to some NHS providers in respect of infection control from 2009, and more broadly from 2010.

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this right means for patients

NHS staff must treat you with reasonable care (this will be determined by the health professional’s practice) in your treatment or when providing other healthcare. The staff who provide NHS services must be qualified and have the experience needed to do their jobs well. They are governed by professional bodies and/or regulators. For example, the Nursing and Midwifery Council is the regulatory body for nurses.

As well as taking reasonable care to ensure a safe system of healthcare and using qualified and experienced staff, NHS and private organisations which have to be registered must register with the Care Quality Commission, and be responsible for meeting safety and registration standards on an ongoing basis.

[\(Refer to page 114 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

“You have the right to expect NHS organisations to monitor, and make efforts to improve, the quality of healthcare they commission or provide.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this right means for patients

Quality of care is personal to each individual patient – you have the right to high-quality care that is safe, effective and right for you.

NHS bodies have put in place systems to measure and improve the overall care they provide so that they can find out how well they are delivering these standards of care. To help achieve this, from April 2010 all PCTs must have arrangements in place to secure continuous improvement in the quality of the healthcare provided by or for them.

Furthermore, PCTs are obliged to ensure that providers of GP services have in place clinical governance arrangements and quality assurance systems.

[\(Refer to page 115 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Pledge

(ii) In addition, there are two pledges relating to quality of care and environment:

“The NHS commits to ensure that services are provided in a clean and safe environment that is fit for purpose, based on national best practice.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

This pledge goes beyond the specific legal requirements for NHS bodies. For example, in committing to ensure that its facilities are fit for purpose, the NHS recognises that the quality and design of buildings and their upkeep have a material impact on the health and well-being of those using them – both public and staff. Specific legal requirements are set out in health and safety legislation and the law relating to negligence. Requirements are also made clear in the duty to provide and maintain a clean and appropriate environment for healthcare, as set out in the *Code of Practice for the Prevention and Control of Healthcare Associated Infections*. All acute trusts are inspected against this code of practice by the regulator, currently the Healthcare Commission and, from April 2009, the Care Quality Commission.

This pledge focuses on those things that the NHS commits to do alongside or in addition to its legal requirements. In particular:

- NHS organisations should take account of the series of **specifications and guidance** that describe how to provide a **clean and safe environment for patient care**. For example, the *National Specifications for Cleanliness in the NHS* set out the standard of cleanliness expected, as well as suggesting the frequency of cleaning needed across the NHS. National best-practice guidance for the design and operation of healthcare facilities ensures that the NHS has the information it needs when refurbishing or rebuilding its facilities to meet both clinical requirements and patients' expectations that their privacy and dignity will be respected and their comfort assured.

- While the NHS has met the nationwide target to halve the number of MRSA bloodstream infections in 2008/09, it is expected to continue to address MRSA bloodstream infections and will look at setting a national minimum standard for these infections. The NHS is also expected to reduce *C. difficile* infections by 30% by 2010/11. Commissioners can take action to ensure high-quality care for patients, such as fining providers who are not making the required improvements on *C. difficile* infections. Patients can find information on infection rates for individual trusts on the Health Protection Agency website at www.hpa.org.uk.
- The NHS has described the **comprehensive measures that it needs to take to prevent infections** and ensure a clean environment in a **national strategy: Clean, safe care**. Measures include making sure that appropriate resources and training are in place for cleaning and undertaking 'deep cleaning', as well as increasing the number of matrons and nursing responsibilities in relation to cleaning.
- NHS trusts have **Design Champions** who **promote high-quality, patient-focused environments** with good working conditions for staff and buildings that make a positive contribution to the neighbourhood. The NHS Design Review Panel helps the NHS achieve high standards of design by reviewing major building proposals at key stages of their development.

Pledge

“The NHS commits to continuous improvement in the quality of services you receive, identifying and sharing best practice in quality of care and treatments.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

All NHS organisations work to improve the quality of the services they provide or commission, including by assessing clinical and service innovations relevant to their clinical responsibilities. In 2008, the Department of Health and the NHS agreed a more ambitious vision for making quality improvement the organising principle of everything the NHS does. *High Quality Care For All* defined quality as having three dimensions: ensuring that care is safe, that it is effective, and that it provides patients with the most positive experience possible. These three dimensions of quality are being placed at the core of everything the NHS does – both as ends in themselves, but also because delivering the best quality of care will ultimately ensure that the system as a whole gives best value.

Individual clinical teams are already encouraged to participate in clinical audit, comparing their standards of care with current best practice. They are also encouraged to share information about what works and new support is being designed to help this process. The NHS will do more to clarify what high-quality care looks like, by supporting the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) in developing quality standards that can be used by commissioners and providers to assess current practices and to inform the commitments they make to patients about what quality of services to expect. NICE will also establish NHS Evidence, a tool to improve NHS access to quality-assured information on clinical best practice (what interventions work best for patients) and, increasingly, guidance on the best models for delivering services. Local services' use of these products will be informed by local needs and priorities, and the NHS will make information about quality performance more accessible through the local publication of quality accounts.

The NHS will also monitor the effectiveness and outcomes of care more systematically through measurement against metrics. These will primarily help local management, although organisations achieving improvements against metrics designed to assess the quality of care can be rewarded financially through the NHS payment mechanism by the Commissioning for Quality and Innovation payment framework. Care will be safeguarded by the Care Quality Commission and continually improved through support for innovation.

Nationally approved treatments, drugs and programmes

- (i) There are three rights covering nationally approved treatments, drugs and programmes:

Right

“You have the right to drugs and treatments that have been recommended by NICE for use in the NHS, if your doctor says they are clinically appropriate for you.”

NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) is an independent NHS organisation producing guidance on drugs and treatments. ‘Recommended’ means recommended by a NICE technology appraisal. Primary care trusts are normally obliged to fund NICE technology appraisals from a date no later than three months from the publication of the appraisal.

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this right means for patients

NICE is the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. It is an independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on promoting good health and preventing and treating ill health.

NICE health technology appraisals make recommendations on the use of specific new and existing drugs and treatments within the NHS. And when a NICE technology appraisal recommends the use of a drug or treatment, PCTs must fund that drug or treatment for patients when it is clinically needed.

In practice this means that you have a right to receive that drug or treatment if your clinician says it is appropriate for you to receive it and it has been recommended by NICE’s technology appraisals.

There are a few cases where the statutory duty to fund a particular technology appraisal recommendation does not apply, usually for a limited period in order to allow the NHS to make arrangements for implementation. In those cases, the right applies once the exemption has expired.

[\(Refer to page 117 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

“You have the right to expect local decisions on funding of other drugs and treatments to be made rationally following a proper consideration of the evidence. If the local NHS decides not to fund a drug or treatment you and your doctor feel would be right for you, they will explain that decision to you.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

The availability of some healthcare services is determined nationally – for example, under NICE’s technology appraisals, where all PCTs have to fund the recommended drugs and treatment.

However, in most cases, decision-making on whether to fund a service or treatment is left to the local PCT. This is to enable PCTs to provide services that best fit the needs of their local population.

For such local decision-making, it is important that the process is rational, transparent and fair. This right ensures that there is such a process.

If a PCT has decided that a treatment will not normally be funded, it needs to be able to consider whether to fund that treatment for an individual patient on an exceptional basis.

The Department of Health has issued statutory Directions to PCTs to ensure that their responsibilities in this area are clear. Further guidance for PCTs will follow.

(Refer to page 117 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right to receive the vaccinations that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommends that you should receive under an NHS-provided national immunisation programme.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is an advisory body responsible for advising the Secretary of State for Health on issues regarding vaccination and immunisation.

The JCVI gives different types of advice. The right will apply where the JCVI makes a recommendation to introduce a new national immunisation programme, or to make a change to those who qualify for an existing national immunisation programme.

Where the JCVI makes a recommendation of this sort, the Secretary of State will be obliged to make arrangements in England to ensure that the national immunisation programme is implemented so that the people who meet the criteria in the recommendation have access to the vaccine via the NHS.

In practice this means that, if you fall into a group that the JCVI recommends is vaccinated against a particular disease, you will have the right, after allowing for a reasonable period of time to implement the programme, to be vaccinated against that disease free of charge on the NHS if you wish to receive the vaccination.

(Refer to page 118 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Pledge

- (ii) In addition, there is one pledge on access to nationally approved treatments, drugs and programmes:

“The NHS commits to provide screening programmes as recommended by the UK National Screening Committee.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

The UK National Screening Committee is the national advisory body for the Government and the NHS. It advises on which screening programmes to introduce nationally, taking into account issues such as safety, quality, and clinical and cost effectiveness. It also supports the implementation, development and quality assurance of screening programmes.

Screening has the potential to save lives and improve quality of life through the early diagnosis of conditions. Screening can reduce the risk of developing a condition or its complications.

Two examples include:

- Approximately 4,500 women’s lives are saved each year in England because of cervical cancer screening.
- 1,600 newborn babies are screened for hearing impairment every day, identifying problems two years earlier than previous methods and safeguarding educational and social development.

This is the first time that the Government has explicitly pledged to fund all recommended screening programmes in the future. In 2008, the NHS started the introduction of a new screening programme for abdominal aortic aneurysm in men aged 65 or over. In order to successfully implement this programme the NHS will be working closely with the doctors who will provide the service, and it will provide additional funding to help local services get started. This will include paying for training, providing clear information for patients and ensuring high-quality systems.

Respect, consent and confidentiality

- (i) There are five rights covering respect, consent and confidentiality:

Right

“You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with your human rights.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this right means for patients

The right to dignity and respect is established by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). The ECHR is designed to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The right to dignity includes a right not to be subjected to inhuman or degrading treatment. The right to respect includes the right to respect for private and family life.

This right has broad meaning, but for the NHS your care, where possible, should be provided in a way that enables you to be treated with dignity and respect.

Health professionals – e.g. your clinician, your physiotherapist or your carer – must also follow the standards set by their own professional body and/or regulator’s regulatory regime.

[\(Refer to page 119 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

“You have the right to accept or refuse treatment that is offered to you, and not to be given any physical examination or treatment unless you have given valid consent. If you do not have the capacity to do so, consent must be obtained from a person legally able to act on your behalf, or the treatment must be in your best interests.”

If you are detained in hospital or on supervised community treatment under the Mental Health Act 1983 different rules may apply to treatment for your mental disorder. These rules will be explained to you at the time. They may mean that you can be given treatment for your mental disorder even though you do not consent.

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this right means for patients

You need to give valid consent (agreement to the course of action) for the treatment that is offered to you before any physical examinations or treatment can be given. If you have not given your consent, you can accept or refuse treatment that is offered to you.

Sometimes you might not be able to give your consent (e.g. if you are unconscious or not of sane mind), in which case consent can be given on your behalf – for example, by the parent of a child.

There are some cases where the courts will decide what is in the person’s best interest. Consent may be more complex for people with mental disabilities. Further detail is set out in the Mental Capacity Act 2005.

The Mental Health Act 1983 also sets out limited circumstances in which a person may, subject to specified safeguards, be treated for their mental disorder without consent. If you are detained in hospital or on supervised community treatment under the Act, any special rules which apply to your treatment will be explained to you at the time.

[\(Refer to page 119 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

“You have the right to be given information about your proposed treatment in advance, including any significant risks and any alternative treatments which may be available, and the risks involved in doing nothing.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this right means for patients

When you are deciding whether to give your consent, this right entitles you to have the information you need to make a decision. The information you are given should include the benefits and the risks of the suggested treatment, as well as the risks if you decide not to take the suggested treatment.

[\(Refer to page 120 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

“You have the right to privacy and confidentiality and to expect the NHS to keep your confidential information safe and secure.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

NHS staff will respect your right to privacy and confidentiality. All the personal information on you and about any treatment you receive from healthcare organisations is confidential. NHS bodies must comply with ‘data protection principles’, which include, subject to certain exceptions, personal information being held or disclosed only with the consent of the individual concerned.

There is a senior clinician in every large NHS organisation, termed a ‘Caldicott Guardian’, who oversees and advises on confidentiality matters and safeguards the interests of patients.

(Refer to page 121 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right of access to your own health records. These will always be used to manage your treatment in your best interests.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

You have the right to see your health records. Ask your clinician if you would like to see them.

There are limited exceptions to this right, mainly to do with national security and the prevention of crime.

(Refer to page 122 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Pledge

- (ii) In addition, there is one pledge relating to respect, consent and confidentiality:

“The NHS commits to share with you any letters sent between clinicians about your care.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

There is evidence that, when patients receive copies of letters between clinicians about their care, it improves their understanding of their condition, enabling them to take control of their own health and to make decisions about their treatment. It also allows them to correct any errors. The relationship between patient and clinician works best when it is based on trust, openness and understanding: copying letters helps to achieve this.

Copies of letters sent between clinicians should be shared with patients. Patients can ask for, and should receive copies of, letters about their care, including letters on referral, letters following outpatient appointments and discharge letters that are routinely sent between clinicians as part of patient care.

The NHS Plan committed the NHS to provide copies of letters to patients, and the Department of Health issued guidance to support NHS trusts in delivering this policy. The NHS is making progress in copying letters to patients, and every year more and more patients are receiving copies of letters as part of their care.

Informed choice

(i) There are three rights covering informed choice:

Right

“You have the right to choose your GP practice, and to be accepted by that practice unless there are reasonable grounds to refuse, in which case you will be informed of those reasons.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

You can choose which GP practice you would like to register with. That GP practice must accept you unless there are good grounds for not doing so, for instance because you live outside the boundaries that they have agreed with the PCT or because they have no spaces left on their list. Whatever the reason, they must tell you why.

If you cannot register with your preferred GP practice, the NHS will help you find another.

(Refer to page 122 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right to express a preference for using a particular doctor within your GP practice, and for the practice to try to comply.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

Within your GP practice, you have the right to say which particular GP you would like to see. Your GP practice will try to give you your choice, but there may be good reasons why you cannot see your preferred GP.

(Refer to page 122 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right to make choices about your NHS care and to information to support these choices. The options available to you will develop over time and depend on your individual needs.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

This is a new right and there is new legislation to support it. Your right to choose will develop as choice is extended into other areas.

From 1 April 2009, you will have the right to choose the organisation that provides your NHS care when you are referred for your first outpatient appointment with a service led by a consultant. There are certain exceptions including:

Persons excluded

- persons detained under the Mental Health Act 1983
- military personnel
- prisoners

Services excluded

- where speed of access to diagnosis and treatment is particularly important, e.g.:
 - emergency attendances/admissions
 - attendances at a Rapid Access Chest Pain Clinic under the two-week maximum waiting time, and
 - attendance at cancer services under the two-week maximum waiting time
- maternity services
- mental health services.

You have a right to information where there is a legal right to choice. Currently, this gives you a right to information to support you in choosing your provider when you are referred for your first outpatient appointment with a service led by a consultant. Information to help you make your choice can be found on the NHS Choices website (www.nhs.uk). PCTs are expected to promote this information and make it more accessible to patients.

(Refer to page 123 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Pledge

(ii) In addition, there are two closely related pledges covering informed choice:

“The NHS commits to inform you about the healthcare services available to you, locally and nationally.”

“The NHS commits to offer you easily accessible, reliable and relevant information to enable you to participate fully in your own healthcare decisions and to support you in making choices. This will include information on the quality of clinical services where there is robust and accurate information available.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Providing information to support choice is a major priority for the NHS. Important recent developments include:

- NHS Choices, which is a website (www.nhs.uk) setting out information on services, treatments and lifestyles. It helps patients to understand what services are available and where these services can be accessed. Increasingly, the information will become available through other channels (such as mobile phones and touch-screen kiosks) which are being developed for those who do not use the internet. NHS Choices is regularly updated with new comparative information, and there is a process to ensure that this is sufficiently robust to be of real use to patients. Information prescriptions, which can be found on NHS Choices, will help people to access relevant information about their long-term condition.
- *Your guide to local health services*, which all PCTs are required to produce and to distribute to every household in the locality.
- *Your health, your way – your guide to long-term conditions and self care* has been published on NHS Choices to provide patients with long-term conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, with information about the choices that should be available to them locally to enable them to care for themselves (self care) in partnership with health and social care professionals.
- Some information about how NHS services are performing is published by the Care Quality Commission (from April 2009, and by the Healthcare Commission before this date).
- Research is a core part of the NHS. Research enables the NHS to improve the current and future health of the people it serves. The NHS will do all it can to ensure that patients, from every part of England, are made aware of research that is of particular relevance to them. The NHS is therefore putting in place procedures to ensure that patients are notified of opportunities to join in relevant ethically approved research and will be free to choose whether they wish to do so.

Involvement in your healthcare and in the NHS

- (i) These are two rights covering involvement in your healthcare and in the NHS:

Right

“You have the right to be involved in discussions and decisions about your healthcare, and to be given information to enable you to do this.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

Your doctor should listen to you and respond to your concerns and preferences about your healthcare. That way you can find out what is the best treatment for you. NHS staff will give you the information you need to support these discussions and decisions.

(Refer to page 124 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right to be involved, directly or through representatives, in the planning of healthcare services, the development and consideration of proposals for changes in the way those services are provided, and in decisions to be made affecting the operation of those services.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

You have the right to have your say in person or through a representative:

- in the planning of healthcare services;
- on the proposals for any changes in the way in which your services are provided; and
- on decisions which may affect the operation of these services.

This right applies if implementation of a proposal or decision would have an impact on:

- the manner in which services are delivered to you or other service users; or
- the range of health services available to you or other service users.

(Refer to page 125 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Pledge

- (ii) In addition, there are two pledges covering involvement in your healthcare and in the NHS:

“The NHS commits to provide you with the information you need to influence and scrutinise the planning and delivery of NHS services.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

In addition to the duty of PCTs to involve their local populations in decisions about the planning and delivery of NHS services in their area, there are a number of policy commitments. Providing accurate and relevant information to support public involvement is an essential element of this. Measures to support PCTs in achieving this include:

- *Our NHS, our future: Leading local change* (published in May 2008), which established clear processes for PCTs to involve patients and the public in decisions about changes to local services.
- The World Class Commissioning programme is a challenging development programme for all PCTs. PCT capability is measured against ten competencies, including one on engaging with patients and the public. This includes a requirement for PCTs to ensure “that patients and the public understand how their views will be used, which decisions they will be involved in, when decisions will be made, and how they can influence the process, and publicise[s] the ways in which public input has influenced decisions”. The performance of all PCTs against these competencies will be measured for the first time in 2008/09.

- *Real Involvement* (published in October 2008) provides guidance to PCTs about how they may meet their obligations to involve by improving their involvement of patients and the public and embedding involvement in their ways of working.
- All PCTs should produce *Your guide to local health services* to inform patients about what services are available locally to support involvement in decisions about the future of services. PCTs should ensure that every household in the locality receives a copy and that it contains information about the ways people can get involved in local health services.
- In addition to this information, the independent assessments of service quality and performance from the Care Quality Commission (from April 2009, and from the Healthcare Commission before this date) can be used by all involved in planning, influencing and scrutinising NHS services.

Pledge

“The NHS commits to work in partnership with you, your family, carers and representatives.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Working in partnership with you

Working in partnership with individual patients is at the heart of many Department of Health policies. These are outlined in the White Paper *Our health, our care, our say*, which sets out how people can take greater control over their care. For example, through the ‘choose and book’ initiative, patients work in partnership with clinicians to arrange their care and book hospital appointments. The NHS is developing information prescriptions for people with long-term conditions to help clinicians signpost people to the right information at the right time.

Providing good quality, timely and relevant information is crucial, as are self care and self management support. *Our Health, our care, our say* sets out the NHS’s commitment to offer a care plan to everyone with a long-term condition by 2010. This is reiterated in the End of Life Care Strategy (2008) which sets out the need for every person at the end of life, and their carer, to be given a care plan to help ensure services are provided to meet their needs and preferences.

Working in partnership with your family, carers and representatives

There are currently many examples across the NHS of carers being treated as expert partners in care and being fully involved in care and discharge planning. The 2008 Carers Strategy includes detailed expectations and committed funds to the vision of making this a reality across the service. This includes pilot schemes in PCTs looking at how the NHS can better support carers, and training for both GPs and other health professionals. Furthermore, a key part of respecting and treating carers as partners in care is ensuring that their health does not suffer because of their caring role. One of the five expected outcomes of the Carers Strategy is to ensure that carers are supported to stay mentally and physically well. The NHS is piloting annual health checks in addition to the actions described above to ensure that this outcome is met.

The publication *Putting people first* (published December 2007) highlights the need to recognise family members and carers as experts and care partners. It also identifies the need for support mechanisms to enable carers to develop their skills and confidence. This is particularly pertinent where carers participate in providing aspects of care such as rehabilitation exercises, wound or drug management and manual handling.

Complaint and redress

(i) There are five rights covering complaint and redress:

Right

“You have the right to have any complaint you make about NHS services dealt with efficiently and to have it properly investigated.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this right means for patients

If you are unhappy with your NHS services, you have the right to make a complaint and for that complaint to be investigated properly.

[\(Refer to page 126 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

“You have the right to know the outcome of any investigation into your complaint.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this right means for patients

If you make a formal complaint (refer to the right above), you have the right to be told about the outcome of the complaint investigation.

[\(Refer to page 126 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

“You have the right to take your complaint to the independent Health Service Ombudsman, if you are not satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the NHS.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

If you are not happy with the outcome of your complaint, you can take your complaint to the Health Service Ombudsman, who carries out independent investigations into complaints about unfair or improper action or poor service by the NHS in England.

Please refer to www.ombudsman.org.uk

(Refer to page 127 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right to make a claim for judicial review if you think you have been directly affected by an unlawful act or decision of an NHS body.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

Judicial review is a process by which you can challenge a decision of the Secretary of State or an NHS body, on the basis that it is unlawful. Judicial review is not a form of appeal and is concerned primarily with how decisions are made, rather than the merits of the decision itself.

To be entitled to bring a claim for judicial review, a person must have a direct, personal interest in the action or decision under challenge. If this is something you want to do, you should seek legal advice. There are time limits for making a claim.

(Refer to page 127 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

“You have the right to compensation where you have been harmed by negligent treatment.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this right means for patients

If you have been harmed through negligent treatment, you have a right to claim for damages. If this is something you want to do you should seek legal advice.

(Refer to page 127 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Pledge

(ii) In addition, there are three closely related pledges on complaint and redress in the NHS Constitution:

“The NHS commits to ensure you are treated with courtesy and you receive appropriate support throughout the handling of a complaint; and the fact that you have complained will not adversely affect your future treatment.”

“The NHS commits, when mistakes happen, to acknowledge them, apologise, explain what went wrong and put things right quickly and effectively.”

“The NHS commits to ensure that the organisation learns lessons from complaints and claims and uses these to improve NHS services.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

If you do have cause to make a complaint about NHS services, the emphasis should be on seeking to resolve a complaint to your satisfaction. You should be involved in decisions about how the complaint is to be handled, and the timescales for providing you with a reply. Although making a complaint to the organisation that provided the service is one way that better allows that organisation to learn lessons from its mistakes and to prevent them happening to anyone else, you should be able to complain to the body that commissions those services – your local PCT – if you prefer. PCTs have an important role in ensuring that all organisations providing NHS services have a fair and effective complaints process. If it proves not to be possible to resolve your complaint locally, you have the right to ask the Health Service Ombudsman to look into your case.

These arrangements will come into effect in April 2009.

Until April 2009, you can make a complaint to the organisation that provides your NHS healthcare, and every attempt will be made to resolve your complaint locally. Where this is not possible, you can ask the Healthcare Commission to consider your complaint. If the complaint is still not resolved, you may then ask the Health Service Ombudsman to look into your case. In April 2009, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) will replace the Healthcare Commission. It will not have a role in handling individual complaints, but the Department of Health is proposing a requirement on registered service providers to have effective systems in place for handling complaints, and for learning from complaints. The CQC will have the powers it needs to ensure registered service providers are handling complaints properly. Where registered service providers fail to meet registration requirements, the CQC will be able to use enforcement powers.

The pledges are consistent with the *Principles of Good Administration*, *Principles of Good Complaint Handling* and *Principles for Remedy*, published by the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman, which the Department of Health fully endorses. These documents are available from the Ombudsman’s website: www.ombudsman.org.uk.

Patient and public responsibilities

The Constitution also describes the responsibilities of patients, the public and staff, setting out the part they can play in helping the NHS to work effectively. The NHS Constitution contains nine responsibilities for patients and the public:

Responsibility

“You should recognise that you can make a significant contribution to your own, and your family’s, good health and well-being, and take some personal responsibility for it.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

You can talk to your doctor, nurse (including health visitors and midwives) or therapist, use NHS Direct (online at www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk or telephone 0845 4647), or go online at NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk). You can ask about what support you might be offered in managing your condition yourself or changing to a healthy lifestyle (e.g. stopping smoking, reducing weight, exercise or reducing excessive alcohol consumption).

Responsibility

“You should register with a GP practice – the main point of access to NHS care.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

To find out where you can register, you can telephone or write to your local primary care trust (the organisation that organises healthcare in your locality), telephone NHS Direct on 0845 4647 or go online at NHS Choices (www.nhs.uk).

Responsibility

“You should treat NHS staff and other patients with respect and recognise that causing a nuisance or disturbance on NHS premises could result in prosecution.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Patients have a right to be treated with respect and dignity in all their dealings with the NHS, but it is equally important that they treat NHS staff with respect in return and do not cause a nuisance or disturbance.

Responsibility

“You should provide accurate information about your health, condition and status.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

The delivery of safe and effective care is reliant on good quality information. Patients are responsible for ensuring that information about them is accurate and up to date. To support patients in this, the NHS is working to develop online applications for storing health information, for example through the HealthSpace initiative. You can find out more at www.healthspace.nhs.uk.

Responsibility

“You should keep appointments, or cancel within reasonable time. Receiving treatment within the maximum waiting times may be compromised unless you do.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

If you cannot make your planned appointment, please contact your doctor, nurse or therapist as soon as you can to let them know. This might make it possible for your appointment to be offered to somebody else.

Responsibility

“You should follow the course of treatment which you have agreed, and talk to your clinician if you find this difficult.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

You should follow the course of treatment that you have agreed with your doctor, nurse or therapist wherever possible. You can ask your doctor/nurse/therapist to explain to you what your treatment options are, what the most appropriate treatment is and why. Where required, a written care plan can also be requested.

Responsibility

“You should participate in important public health programmes such as vaccination.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Your doctor, nurse or therapist will advise you of the benefits and risks of vaccination programmes appropriate to you and other services designed to improve your health.

Responsibility

“You should ensure that those closest to you are aware of your wishes about organ donation.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

You can find out more about organ donation and how to become a donor at www.uktransplant.org.uk.

Responsibility

“You should give feedback – both positive and negative – about the treatment and care you have received, including any adverse reactions you may have had.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

The Department of Health will ensure that all NHS organisations provide an opportunity to give feedback on the NHS care that you receive. This might be through national, local and/or practice surveys, complaints, or through the formal grievance processes.

Part II: Staff

Introduction

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

This section describes the elements of the NHS Constitution that refer to NHS staff. It covers:

- staff rights;
- staff pledges;
- staff legal duties; and
- expectations of staff.

It is our vision that all staff commissioning and providing NHS services should have rewarding jobs. They will be able to provide quality care, because jobs will have been designed around patients with the input of staff. The inclusion of staff pledges, expectations, responsibilities and legal duties in this Handbook reflects the fact that improving the patient experience requires the continued improvement of the working lives of staff. Staff covered by this Handbook include employees and contractors (people operating under a contract to provide services) who commission and/or provide NHS services, whether they work for NHS organisations or for non NHS organisations.

Context

The principles that this section is based on come from research on 'What Matters to Staff', which was carried out in 2007. This involved around 9,000 NHS staff across all professions and sought to identify what matters to them in their work. The research identified four themes. These are now reflected in the NHS staff survey and also inform the draft NHS Constitution and values. The values represent what is important to those who both use and provide NHS services, and can guide it in the 21st century. What matters to staff is that they have:

- the resources to deliver quality care for patients;
- the support they need to do a good job;
- a worthwhile job with chances to develop; and
- the opportunity to improve the way they work.

To really embrace the full and challenging definition of quality set out in the Next Stage Review, it must be recognised that high-quality care requires high-quality workplaces, with commissioners and providers aiming to be employers of choice.

Rights, pledges, expectations and responsibilities

This Handbook sets out our vision of the rights, pledges, expectations and legal duties that staff and employers can expect. These exist on two levels – the organisational and the personal.

At an organisational level, the NHS staff survey provides a key tool through which staff can express their views and offer feedback about their organisation as a whole. This Handbook should provide useful information to allow staff to consider their responses to any surveys. More and more organisations are using their survey findings to influence the way in which things are done locally and to address staff concerns. The Care Quality Commission will use the staff survey as a measure of staff satisfaction, and will include this in its annual report on trusts.

At a personal level, the information in this Handbook should provide a framework for discussions among individual members of staff and with their line managers, informing and enabling discussions on service improvement, team working, performance management, training and development. It is always better to discuss and resolve issues quickly. Staff should speak to a member of the management team or seek support from a colleague; options such as mediation should also be explored if problems persist. The Handbook is designed to be a useful reference tool and is not intended to provide any new grounds for individual grievances or litigation. **The first section (page 74)** summarises the current legal position (as at January 2009) on employees' rights. **The second section (page 92)** includes pledges from employers, demonstrating their commitment to strive to provide a good working environment for staff. **The third section (page 98)** summarises the current position on employees' legal duties. **The fourth section (page 104)** includes details of employers' general expectations of staff. However, the law changes all the time, and rights and duties will also vary according to individual contracts of employment, so this should not be regarded as definitive legal advice. Anyone seeking to enforce legal rights or duties should seek their own legal advice.

Staff rights

This section summarises some important existing rights for all employees. It is not a statement of the law and should not be regarded or relied upon as legal advice. Individual employees or employers must seek their own legal advice in all cases. Please remember that the law is constantly changing and that this document is a snapshot of the position as at January 2009. It is important to note that legal rights and duties will also vary according to an individual contract of employment. Employers or employees seeking to rely upon or enforce legal rights or duties should also seek their own legal

advice in all cases. Where an employee feels that a right is not being respected this should normally be raised with their line manager in the first instance. Local Human Resources/Personnel teams will have details of their informal and formal resolution procedures and of how redress can be sought. In certain circumstances, an employee may also have the right to complain to an employment tribunal and it is very important for the employee to seek legal advice before doing so.

1. "Have a good working environment with flexible working opportunities, consistent with the needs of patients and with the way that people live their lives."

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To fair treatment regarding leave, rights and flexible working and other statutory leave requests relating to work and family, including caring for adults that you live with.

What this right means for staff

This right means that you can seek redress through your local arrangements to deal with disagreements either on specific contractual issues (terms and conditions) or on more general employment rights. If unsuccessful, you would have recourse to employment tribunal processes.

Employers are required to consider flexible working options for disabled staff and job applicants under the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and parents/carers of some children.

(Refer to page 128 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

To request other 'reasonable' time off for emergencies (paid and unpaid) and other statutory leave (subject to exceptions).

What this right means for staff

Employers should provide employees with access to leave arrangements that help them to balance their work responsibilities with their personal commitments.

[\(Refer to page 128 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

To expect reasonable steps are taken by the employer to ensure protection from less favourable treatment by fellow employees, patients and others (e.g. bullying or harassment).

What this right means for staff

Bullying and harassment are serious issues and should not be tolerated. Every organisation should have in place a bullying and harassment policy that is easily accessible to staff and managers. This should be monitored on a regular basis by senior managers. It should include details on how such issues will be investigated in a fair and timely way.

[\(Refer to page 129 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

2. "Have a fair pay and contract framework."

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To pay; consistent with the National Minimum Wage or alternative contractual agreement.

To fair treatment regarding pay.

What this right means for staff

Although individual employers retain some rights to determine their own pay policies, the overwhelming majority continue to use national NHS pay policy.

National pay policy for the NHS is designed to provide fair, affordable pay in order to recruit, retain and motivate staff for the benefit of patients and to provide value for money for taxpayers. It also provides a range of flexibilities, such as the opportunity for recruitment and retention premia, to ensure that individual employers have the ability to respond effectively to local circumstances, while retaining a consistent national pay framework that is transparent and ensures equal pay for work of equal value.

Changes to pay and pay systems from year to year are important to everyone involved in providing NHS services – both as employees and employers. In making these changes, independent advice and recommendations are sought as part of the transparent process to inform the final decision.

If your line manager cannot resolve a problem with your pay and you have sought advice and support from other people in your organisation, you may be able to lodge a 'grievance' with your employer. If that does not lead to a resolution locally, then you may be able to make a claim, which, in some circumstances, would be heard by an employment tribunal or county court.

For staff who transfer from the NHS to work on NHS-funded contracts, their pay, terms and conditions are protected at the point of transfer under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (TUPE).

(Refer to page 130 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

3. "Be involved and represented in the workplace."

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To be accompanied by either a Trade Union official or a work colleague at disciplinary or grievance hearings in line with legislation, your employer's policies or your contractual rights.

What this right means for staff

If you are required to attend either a grievance hearing or a meeting or hearing that may result in disciplinary action, you can make a reasonable request to your employer to be accompanied by either a Trade Union official (if you are a member of the union) or another work colleague. The person accompanying you can present and summarise your case and respond, on your behalf, to any view expressed at the hearing if you want them to do so. They cannot, however, answer questions on your behalf unless you and your employer agree.

Your employer's own disciplinary and grievance procedures may allow the accompanying person to take a fuller representational role and participate at an earlier stage of the process.

[\(Refer to page 131 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Right

To consultation and representation either through the Trade Union or other staff representatives (for example where there is no Trade Union in place) in line with legislation and any collective agreements that may be in force.

What this right means for staff

It is good practice for your employer to inform and consult you and your Trade Union or other staff representatives on issues which may have an impact on your employment.

You should be consulted on an individual basis by your employer in any situation where your job may be at risk.

In certain situations, such as redundancy or staff transfers, your employer has either a statutory or a contractual obligation to inform and consult you or your Trade Union (or other staff representatives where there is no Trade Union in place).

Exactly who is consulted and how this occurs will depend upon the particular circumstances of your case, your individual employment contract and whether any collective agreements apply.

A recognised Trade Union may enter into collective agreements on your behalf where the Trade Union is recognised for this purpose by your employer in line with legislation.

[\(Refer to page 131 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

4. "Have healthy and safe working conditions and an environment free from harassment, bullying or violence."

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To work within a healthy and safe workplace and an environment in which the employer has taken all practical steps to ensure the workplace is free from verbal or physical violence from patients, the public or staff, to work your contractual hours, take annual leave and to take regular breaks from work.

What this right means for staff

You can expect your employer to have made a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks to the health and safety of employees and to have identified preventive and protective measures to be put in place. This will include arrangements to ensure effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of the preventive and protective measures.

If your organisation is unable to resolve an issue, under health and safety legislation a complaint can be raised with the Health and Safety Executive or the local enforcing authority.

[\(Refer to page 132 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

5. "Be treated fairly, equally and free from discrimination."

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To a working environment (including practices on recruitment and promotion) free from unlawful discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age or religion or belief.

What this right means for staff

NHS organisations are bound by the laws on unlawful discrimination that apply to all employers. In addition, as public bodies, they generally have duties in carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and to eliminate unlawful discrimination.

As a matter of good practice, your organisation should have a clear policy on equality and diversity, enabling people from the widest range of backgrounds to join and progress through the organisation, and a zero-tolerance approach to unlawful discrimination, bullying and harassment. Your organisation should also be knowledgeable about equality and diversity (with staff training available on these issues), and be committed to working towards best practice for inclusive recruitment and development. Examples of best practice include guaranteeing an interview to any disabled candidate who meets the essential criteria set out in the person specification for a vacancy.

If you believe and have evidence that your employer has breached its legal responsibilities, once internal options have been pursued, a complaint can be made to an employment tribunal or to the Equality and Human Rights Commission.

[\(Refer to page 133 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

6. "Can raise an internal grievance and if necessary seek redress, where it is felt that a right has not been upheld."

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To have disciplinary and grievance procedures conducted appropriately and within internal and legal requirements.

What this right means for staff

Your organisation should have a written procedure for handling any disciplinary or grievance issues. This will set out the process which should be followed. This provides that all employers have to have in place minimum statutory procedures for dealing with dismissal, disciplinary action and grievances in the workplace. Employees have to raise a grievance in most circumstances before presenting a claim in the employment tribunal. (Note that the current grievance and disciplinary procedures are due to be repealed when the Employment Bill takes effect on 6 April 2009.)

(Refer to page 134 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

To appeal against wrongful dismissal.

What this right means for staff

Any internal appeal process should be set out in your local contractual terms and conditions.

(Refer to page 134 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

If internal processes fail to overturn a dismissal, you have the right to pursue a claim in the employment tribunal, if you meet required criteria.

What this right means for staff

Any complaint may be made to either the employment tribunal or civil courts, depending on the nature and value of the claim made.

(Refer to page 134 in the Appendix for the source of the right)

Right

To protection from detriment in employment and the right not to be unfairly dismissed for 'whistleblowing' or reporting wrongdoing in the workplace.

What this right means for staff

If staff follow procedures laid down in Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, they will be protected against whistleblowing. There is also a confidential helpline that staff can use when considering whistleblowing, which is run by Public Concern at Work and staffed by legal experts. The helpline number is **020 7404 6609**.

[\(Refer to page 135 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

7. Have employment protection (NHS employees only).**Right**

You have a right to employment protection in terms of continuity of service for redundancy purposes if moving between NHS employers.

What this right means for staff

A doctor or dentist on the training grades of registrar, senior registrar or specialist registrar will have their employment with a health service employer treated as being continuous when they move to a different health service employer. They will continue to be eligible for redundancy payments.

[\(Refer to page 136 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

8. Can join the NHS Pension Scheme (NHS employees and some other groups, e.g. GPs).

Right

You have rights relating to the ability to join the NHS Pension Scheme.

What this right means for staff

Staff employed by NHS organisations are able to join the NHS Pension Scheme, as are GPs, dentists and some other NHS primary care practitioners.

Staff transferred to social enterprises, charities and the third sector can retain membership of the NHS Pension Scheme by having their new employer apply for a Secretary of State Direction.

For staff employed on NHS-funded contracts, the Cabinet Office *Code of Practice on Workforce Matters in Public Sector Contracts* requires reasonable pension arrangements to be offered. A good-quality employer pension scheme can be either a contracted-out final salary (defined benefit) scheme or a defined contribution scheme. For defined contribution schemes, including stakeholders schemes, the employer must match employee contributions up to 6% of salary, although either could pay more if they wished.

[\(Refer to page 137 in the Appendix for the source of the right\)](#)

Staff pledges

Pledge

The pledges to NHS staff reaffirm the vision that quality workplaces should exist for all staff delivering NHS services – they should not just be the preserve of high-performing organisations. This is important, since the evidence suggests that there is a clear connection between the experiences of patients and staff.

“The NHS commits to provide all staff with clear roles and responsibilities and rewarding jobs for teams and individuals that make a difference to patients, their families and carers and communities.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

The work being led in each region on the eight clinical pathways and new models of care give real focus to the work that is under way to modernise career pathways for doctors, nurses, scientists and allied health professionals, and for staff in the wider health team. There is a real chance to benefit both patients and staff by designing roles and responsibilities that both enable the delivery of high-quality care and allow staff to make a difference to patients, their families, carers and communities.

Contracts of employment for most NHS staff support this pledge. For example, under Agenda for Change, staff jobs should have been robustly evaluated and linked to pay rates. There should be regular appraisals and opportunities for training and development.

The pledges are made by all employers that provide NHS services, and are made to all staff that deliver NHS care, both professional and non-professional.

The pledges are not legally binding but represent a commitment by the NHS to provide high-quality working environments for staff.

“The NHS commits to provide all staff with personal development, access to appropriate training for their jobs and line management support to succeed.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

The Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) supports staff through annual appraisal, development review and training.

Educational governance and investment in Continuous Personal Development (CPD) will be strengthened. In particular, every organisation that receives central education and training funding will be required to adopt the Government’s Skills Pledge, to demonstrate a commitment to support all their staff in achieving qualifications at a minimum of level 2, which is equivalent to five good GCSEs.

The current NHS education funding arrangements will be reviewed to ensure that they are fairer, more transparent, provide improved value for money and are responsive to the feedback from trainees.

Spotting and developing confident leaders is a priority for everyone if improving quality is the shared purpose. The Department of Health will produce talent and leadership guidance for regions to help with improvement and bring leadership centre stage.

Pledge

“The NHS commits to provide support and opportunities for staff to maintain their health, well-being and safety.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

All NHS staff should be able to work in a safe and healthy environment, in line with existing general employment law. NHS employers are legally responsible for providing a safe working environment for staff, and staff should ensure that they are fit to practise and that they, too, comply with health and safety legislation.

NHS employers, staff and staff side are working in partnership to go beyond the legal minimums by building on the Department of Health's *Improving Working Lives Standard* (2000), *Healthy Workplaces Handbook* (2007) and the NHS Staff Council *Occupational Health and Safety Standards* (2008).

Staff are also supported at work in a number of other ways:

- Through a Secretary of State Direction, trusts are required to prevent violence against staff wherever possible, and to take all appropriate action, including prosecution of offenders, when violence does occur. The NHS Security Management Service has taken a number of steps to enable a reduction in violence against staff, and is working with local organisations to help them take appropriate action.
- The code of practice for the prevention and control of healthcare associated infections (published in 2006 and revised in January 2008) places a duty on all NHS organisations to ensure that staff, as well as patients and others, are protected against the risks of acquiring a healthcare associated infection.
- In order to tackle the anti-social behaviour that affects staff and their ability to perform their roles, legislation now provides for NHS staff or the police to remove individuals not requiring treatment who are creating a nuisance or disturbance. When this provision is commenced, failure to leave hospital premises without reasonable excuse will be an offence that could result in a fine of up to £1,000.

Staff should also receive appropriate support for their health and well-being, including their mental health. There are already a considerable number of initiatives at all levels. The Department of Health, NHS Security Management Service, NHS Employers, NHS Plus and others are actively supporting programmes to provide a healthy working environment, improve the health and well-being of NHS staff, and tackle bullying, harassment and stress in the workplace.

The Department of Health has funded a pilot project to improve the health of NHS staff. 'Creating a Healthier NHS' provides online and offline health questionnaires linked to tailored lifestyle management programmes, to help staff choose how best to improve their physical and mental well-being.

Additionally, the Department of Health will commission a comprehensive review to gather evidence on the health of NHS staff, and their health and well-being provision at work. The joint Department of Health/NHS review will build a comprehensive evidence base to allow effective system-wide improvements in the health and well-being of the NHS workforce. It will be carried out in partnership with employers and staff.

Pledge

“The NHS commits to engage staff in decisions that affect them and the services they provide, individually, through representative organisations and through local partnership working arrangements. All staff will be empowered to put forward ways to deliver better and safer services for patients and their families.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

The national Social Partnership Forum offers an opportunity to discuss, debate and involve partners in the development and implementation of the workforce implications of policy. Similar arrangements are being developed at strategic health authority level and in many employers across the country. Organisations that deliver NHS services often rely on good partnership working with trade unions. They also rely on partnership working with professional organisations and stakeholders. The benefits of such working are best realised when staff representatives bring an authentic employee voice to the partnership in a spirit of flexibility and constructive joint problem solving, with the aim of service improvement.

The national Social Partnership Forum launched the *Partnership Agreement* between the Department of Health, NHS Employers and NHS trade unions in February 2007. The *Partnership Agreement* includes the principles of effective joint working and is available at www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_072465.

True partnership working requires all partners to build capability and therefore a firm commitment to provide resources at all levels.

The Department of Health published guidance in the handbook on staff involvement. The handbook is available at:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4071622.

The best-performing organisations have staff who are engaged with their employer and motivated by the work they do. To recognise the achievements of these employers and accelerate the sharing of good practices, the Department of Health will work with key partners to ensure that annual competitions identify the best NHS employers.

The Department of Health will commission a long-term research project based on the data from the NHS staff survey and best-practice organisations, and will publish evidence and experiences from these and other organisations to support employees to improve.

NHS Gateway will be developed as a portal on which to search for the best available guidance and evidence. It will enable staff to sign up to receive the latest best-practice knowledge, together with information on quality performance.

Staff legal duties

This section summarises some important existing legal rights that staff must observe. This is a summary of the position and is not intended to be legal advice or relied upon as legal advice. Employees are advised to seek independent legal advice on their rights in all cases.

Duty

“To accept professional accountability and maintain the standards of professional practice as set by the appropriate regulatory body applicable to your profession or role.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Action can be taken based on the policies and practices of regulatory bodies, e.g. the General Medical Council, Nursing and Midwifery Council, etc.

(Refer to page 138 in the Appendix for the source of the duty)

Duty

“To take reasonable care of health and safety at work for you, your team and others, and to co-operate with employers to ensure compliance with health and safety requirements.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Disciplinary action may be taken by the employer against staff who breach health and safety policies.

(Refer to page 138 in the Appendix for the source of the duty)

Duty

“To act in accordance with the express and implied terms of your contract of employment.”

e.g. the express terms regarding hours, place and duties of work, annual and sickness absence provisions, equality and diversity policies, etc., and also the implied duty of mutual trust and confidence, the duty to serve and work for the employer, exercise reasonable skill and competence when undertaking your duties, to obey reasonable and lawful orders, to adhere to the duty of fidelity towards the employer.

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this means in practice

An employer may take disciplinary action against the employee for failure to observe the express and implied terms, the ultimate sanction being dismissal after following a fair and legal process.

These are express and implied terms of the contract of employment under common law. A written statement of particulars is required to be provided to an employee, not later than two months after the beginning of the employment contract.

[\(Refer to page 139 in the Appendix for the source of the duty\)](#)

Duty

“Not to discriminate against patients or staff and to adhere to equal opportunities and equality and human rights legislation.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Disciplinary action may be taken by an employer against workers who breach discrimination policies. The information commissioner may also take action against an employer for an employee’s breach of the Data Protection Act.

(Refer to page 140 in the Appendix for the source of the duty)

Duty

“To protect the confidentiality of personal information that you hold unless to do so would put anyone at risk of significant harm.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Disciplinary action may be taken by the employer against workers who breach the data protection policies.

(Refer to page 141 in the Appendix for the source of the duty)

Duty

“To be honest and truthful in applying for a job and in carrying out that job.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

An employer could take disciplinary action for failure to adhere to duty of trust and confidence.

Certificates of an employee’s previous convictions can be obtained from the Criminal Records Bureau under Part V of the Police Act 1997.

(Refer to page 141 in the Appendix for the source of the duty)

Expectations – how staff should play their part in ensuring the success of the NHS

The highest quality of patient care is delivered by staff who are ambitious in their expectations of themselves and their colleagues. These expectations show how staff can play their part in delivering high-quality care. They also correspond to some degree to the staff pledges and chime with the NHS values. They apply to all staff providing NHS care.

This section sets out the expectations that employers can legitimately expect from employees they deliver the pledges to, and gives some examples of what staff can do to help realise those expectations.

Expectation

“You should aim to maintain the highest standards of care and service, taking responsibility not only for the care you personally provide, but also for your wider contribution to the aims of your team and the NHS as a whole.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Treat everyone as you would wish to be treated.

Engage actively in your team.

Work with your manager or supervisor to be clear about your objectives.

Set an example to and support your colleagues.

Speak well of NHS services and the organisation you work for.

Contribute to the training of others.

Expectation

“You should aim to take up training and development opportunities provided over and above those legally required of your post.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Keep your professional and other job-related skills up to date.

Actively engage in appraisal, personal development planning and revalidation (when introduced).

Ensure that you complete mandatory or statutory training.

Expectation

“You should aim to play your part in sustainably improving services by working in partnership with patients, the public and communities.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Contribute your ideas, and welcome contribution from others.

Inform yourself about, and be prepared to contribute to, discussions on issues and decisions that impact upon your work and/or the services you provide or support.

Expectation

“You should aim to be open with patients, their families, carers or representatives, including if anything goes wrong; welcoming and listening to feedback and addressing concerns promptly and in a spirit of co-operation. You should contribute to a climate where the truth can be heard and the reporting of, and learning from, errors is encouraged.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

What this means in practice

Report errors, near misses and incidents.

Be vigilant about hygiene and report unacceptable hygiene practices.

Participate in the NHS staff survey.

Do not tolerate bullying, harassment or violence.

Communicate openly, honestly and sympathetically with patients, their families, carers or representatives about their care.

Apologise as soon as possible if a patient safety incident occurs.

If a mistake or error has been made, acknowledge what has happened; apologise and explain clearly what went wrong and what is being done in response to the incident; reassure patients, their families, carers or representatives that lessons learned will help prevent the incident recurring, and provide support to cope with the physical and psychological consequences of what happened.

Expectation

“You should aim to view the services you provide from the standpoint of a patient, and involve patients, their families and carers in the services you provide, working with them, their communities and other organisations, and making it clear who is responsible for their care.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

What this means in practice

Understand your organisation’s complaints procedures.

Respect patient concerns.

Listen to your patients, their families and carers.

Seek users’ views on services.

Respect patients and treat them with dignity.

Appendix

There are five rights covering access to health services:

Right

“You have the right to receive NHS services free of charge, apart from certain limited exceptions sanctioned by Parliament.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Part 1 of the NHS Act 2006 sets out the primary duty on the Secretary of State to promote a comprehensive health service and to provide or secure the provision of services for that purpose. The section goes on to state that those services must be provided free of charge (unless charges are expressly provided for). The requirement to provide services free of charge applies in particular to hospital and community health services (services provided under Part 3 of the Act).

For primary care services, including GP services, the legislation that governs the arrangements (under which those services are commissioned by primary care trusts) does not generally permit the charging of patients (sections 83, 99, 115 and 126 of the NHS Act 2006).

There are a number of exceptions to the general prohibition on charging. In particular:

- prescription charges – section 172 of the NHS Act 2006 enables the Secretary of State to make regulations imposing prescription charges (National Health Service (Charges for Drugs and Appliances) Regulations 2000);
- dental charges – section 176 enables the Secretary of State to make regulations imposing charges for dental services (National Health Service (Dental Charges) Regulations 2005); and
- charges for overseas visitors – section 175 enables the Secretary of State to make regulations imposing charges where certain non-UK residents receive NHS services (National Health Service (Charges for Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989).

Right

“You have the right to access NHS services. You will not be refused access on unreasonable grounds.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Legislation on discrimination makes it unlawful for a public authority in the exercise of its functions, and for persons (including public authorities) providing goods, facilities or services to the public, to discriminate on specified grounds (subject to exceptions of justification in certain circumstances). In particular, the following discrimination is unlawful:

- discrimination on grounds of race – sections 19B and 20 of the Race Relations Act 1976;
- discrimination on grounds of religion or belief – sections 46 and 52 of the Equality Act 2006;
- discrimination on grounds of gender – sections 21A and 29 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975;
- discrimination on grounds of disability – sections 19 and 21B of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and
- discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation – regulations 4 and 8 of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007.

Furthermore, primary care trusts, NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts must act in accordance with administrative law, i.e. their policies and decisions must be in accordance with their statutory duties, be reasonable and procedurally fair. In addition to the legislation on discrimination, therefore, it would be unlawful for those bodies to refuse access on unreasonable grounds.

Right

“You have the right to expect your local NHS to assess the health requirements of the local community and to commission and put in place the services to meet those needs as considered necessary.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The legislation under which primary care trusts commission services requires them to provide or arrange for the provision of services to such extent as they consider necessary to meet all reasonable requirements (sections 3, 83, 99, 115 and 126 of the NHS Act 2006).

Right

“You have the right, in certain circumstances, to go to other European Economic Area countries or Switzerland for treatment which would be available to you through your NHS commissioner.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

European Community law, in particular:

- Article 49 of the Treaty Establishing the European Community;
- Under EC Regulation 1408/71 (from 2010 EC Regulation 883/2004); and
- European Court of Justice case law.

It should be noted that the European Commission has published a proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the application of patients’ rights in cross-border healthcare (COM(2008) 414 final).

This is currently being negotiated in Brussels and therefore has no legal force.

Right

“You have the right not to be unlawfully discriminated against in the provision of NHS services including on grounds of gender, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, disability (including learning disability or mental illness) or age.”¹

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Legislation on discrimination makes it unlawful for a person providing services to discriminate on various grounds without proper justification, in particular:

- discrimination on grounds of race – section 20 of the Race Relations Act 1976;
- discrimination on grounds of religion or belief – section 46 of the Equality Act 2006;
- discrimination on grounds of gender – section 29 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975;
- discrimination on grounds of disability – section 19 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; and
- discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation – regulation 4 of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007.

In addition, where your human rights are engaged (e.g. Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (right to life)), discrimination may be contrary to Article 14 of the ECHR.

Individual health professionals are also governed by the standards set under the professional regulatory regime that applies to their profession.

¹ The Government intends to use the Equality Bill to make unjustifiable age discrimination against adults unlawful in the provision of services and exercise of public functions. Subject to Parliamentary approval, this right not to be discriminated against will extend to age when the relevant provisions are brought into force for the health sector.

There are two rights covering quality of care and environment:

Right

“You have the right to be treated with a professional standard of care, by appropriately qualified and experienced staff, in a properly approved or registered organisation that meets required levels of safety and quality.”²

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The law of negligence imposes a duty of care on providers of healthcare. This is a duty to take reasonable care and skill in the provision of treatment or other healthcare. For a health professional, what constitutes ‘reasonable care and skill’ will be determined by reference to professional practice. In the case of an NHS body or private organisation, it must take reasonable care to ensure a safe system of healthcare – using appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

If a provider breaches the duty and as a result causes injury to a patient, the patient is entitled to damages to compensate for the injury and resulting financial loss.

Regulations under the NHS Act 2006 governing the provision of GP and most other primary care services require practitioners to exercise reasonable care and skill in the delivery of obligations under their contracts.

Individual health professionals are also governed by the standards set under the professional regulatory regime that applies to their profession.

From 1 April 2010, health and adult social care providers in England carrying out ‘regulated activity’ (as set out in regulations made under the Health and Social Care Act 2008) will need to be registered with the Care Quality Commission in order to provide care. The Commission will provide independent assurance that registered organisations – including NHS organisations – are providing care to the essential levels of safety and quality that users are entitled to expect, and can take independent enforcement action where providers are not meeting their nationally set registration requirements. Before 1 April 2010, the quality of care will be independently monitored and assessed within a framework of quality standards called *Standards for Better Health*.

² The registration system will apply to some NHS providers in respect of infection control from 2009, and more broadly from 2010.

From 1 April 2009, provisions of Part 1 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008 will be commenced so that infection control requirements imposed on some NHS bodies in England will fall to be monitored by the Care Quality Commission. Other healthcare providers that are required to be registered under the Care Standards Act 2000 will need to continue to register under the Care Standards Act until 1 April 2010 when the registration regime under the Health and Social Care Act 2008 comes fully into force.

Right

“You have the right to expect NHS organisations to monitor, and make efforts to improve, the quality of healthcare they commission or provide.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The law of negligence imposes a duty of care on providers of healthcare. This is a duty to take reasonable care and skill in the provision of treatment or other healthcare. For a health professional, what constitutes ‘reasonable care and skill’ will be determined by reference to professional practice. In the case of an NHS body or private organisation, it must take reasonable care to ensure a safe system of healthcare – using appropriately qualified and experienced staff.

Individual health professionals are also governed by the standards set under the professional regulatory regime that applies to their profession.

From 1 April 2010, health and adult social care providers in England will need to be registered with the Care Quality Commission in order to provide care. The Commission will provide independent assurance that registered organisations – including NHS organisations – are providing care to the essential levels of safety and quality that users are entitled to expect, and can take independent enforcement action where providers are not meeting their nationally set registration requirements.

NHS bodies have a statutory duty to have arrangements in place for the purpose of monitoring and improving the quality of care they provide (section 45 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003).

From April 2010, this will be replaced by a duty on primary care trusts to have arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the quality of the healthcare provided by or for them (section 139 of the Health and Social Care Act 2008).

Regulations under the NHS Act 2006 governing the provision of GP and other primary care services require providers to have clinical governance arrangements and quality assurance systems.

There are three rights covering nationally approved treatments, drugs and programmes:

Right

“You have the right to drugs and treatments that have been recommended by NICE³ for use in the NHS, if your doctor says they are clinically appropriate for you.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Directions given by the Secretary of State to primary care trusts on the funding of guidance in National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) technology appraisals. The directions are made under section 8 of the NHS Act 2006 and primary care trusts have a legal obligation to comply with such Directions.

The Directions require primary care trusts to apply funding so as to ensure that a treatment covered by an appraisal is normally available within three months after the date of publication of the appraisal.

The Secretary of State may, by further Directions under section 8 of the NHS Act 2006, exempt particular appraisals from this right, or extend the period that trusts have to provide funding.

Right

“You have the right to expect local decisions on funding of other drugs and treatments to be made rationally following a proper consideration of the evidence. If the local NHS decides not to fund a drug or treatment you and your doctor feel would be right for you, they will explain that decision to you.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Administrative law requires that primary care trusts' decisions are rational, procedurally fair and within their powers.

³ NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence) is an independent NHS organisation producing guidance on drugs and treatments. 'Recommended' means recommended by a NICE technology appraisal. Primary care trusts are normally obliged to fund NICE technology appraisals from a date no later than three months from the publication of the appraisal.

In addition, decisions by the courts have made it clear that, although a primary care trust can have a policy not to fund a particular treatment (unless recommended by a NICE technology appraisal), it cannot have a blanket policy; i.e. it must consider exceptional individual cases where funding should be provided.

In addition, the Secretary of State has given further Directions to primary care trusts under section 8 of the NHS Act 2006 concerning arrangements for making such decisions. The Directions will come into force from 1 April 2009.

Right

“You have the right to receive the vaccinations that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation recommends that you should receive under an NHS-provided national immunisation programme.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Regulations will place a duty on the Secretary of State to accept and make the necessary arrangements to implement JCVI recommendations, where those recommendations meet certain conditions. This will come into effect on 1 April 2009

The Secretary of State will be permitted reasonable time in which to introduce the national immunisation programme. Implementing a national campaign can be complicated to organise and the high-level implementation stage can take up to two years or more following a recommendation.

In addition, a duty will be placed on primary care trusts to make arrangements to offer vaccination to those individuals who fall within the JCVI recommendation.

There are five rights covering respect, consent and confidentiality:

Right

“You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with your human rights.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The right to be treated with dignity and respect is derived from the rights conferred by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), as given effect in UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998. The relevant rights under the ECHR are the right to life (Article 2), the right not to be subject to inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3) and the right to respect for private and family life (Article 8).

It is unlawful for a public body to act incompatibly with those ECHR rights (section 6 of the Human Rights Act).

Individual health professionals are also governed by the standards set under the professional regulatory regime that applies to their profession.

Right

“You have the right to accept or refuse treatment that is offered to you, and not to be given any physical examination or treatment unless you have given valid consent. If you do not have the capacity to do so, consent must be obtained from a person legally able to act on your behalf, or the treatment must be in your best interests.”⁴

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The law relating to battery and assault makes it generally unlawful for a person to be given a physical examination or treatment unless they have given valid consent.

Investigation or treatment without valid consent may constitute a criminal offence or amount to battery.

⁴ If you are detained in hospital or on supervised community treatment under the Mental Health Act 1983 different rules may apply to treatment for your mental disorder. These rules will be explained to you at the time. They may mean that you can be given treatment for your mental disorder even though you do not consent.

If a person does not have the capacity to consent because of their physical or mental state, or because they are a child with insufficient understanding to give consent, treatment may take place without the consent of the individual concerned. In such cases, treatment may be consented to by another individual – for example, the parent of a child, or a personal welfare attorney appointed under the Mental Capacity Act 2005. In other cases, treatment must be in the best interests of the patient (in some cases, the NHS may apply to the court for a declaration that a particular treatment is in a person's best interests).

The Mental Capacity Act 2005 contains further detailed rules about capacity and consent to treatment.

Individual health professionals are also governed by the standards set under the professional regulatory regime that applies to their profession.

Right

“You have the right to be given information about your proposed treatment in advance, including any significant risks and any alternative treatments which may be available, and the risks involved in doing nothing.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Under the law of negligence, a health professional may breach their duty of care to their patient if they fail to provide them with sufficient information in advance of treatment to ensure valid consent.

If no information is provided, or the information is insufficient and the individual patient would not have consented if they had been given sufficient information, and they have suffered physical harm as a result of the procedures, they are entitled to bring a claim for damages as compensation for the loss suffered.

Individual health professionals are also governed by the standards set under the professional regulatory regime that applies to their profession.

Right

“You have the right to privacy and confidentiality and to expect the NHS to keep your confidential information safe and secure.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The common law imposes a duty of confidentiality, including where individuals or bodies providing healthcare receive or hold personal information relating to an individual patient.

This requires that information held in confidence is only disclosed to a third party when the subject of the information has consented, when there is a basis in law for disclosure, or the public good that would be served by disclosure outweighs an individual's right to confidentiality.

The Data Protection Act 1998 provides additional safeguards by requiring those who hold personal information to comply with various 'data protection principles'. These include ensuring that information is held securely with appropriate technical and organisational measures to prevent unauthorised or unlawful use.

A right to privacy, for both individual and family life, is provided under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) as given effect in UK law by the Human Rights Act 1998. Article 8 establishes a right to respect for private and family life, which encompasses the disclosure of personal information.

Regulations under the NHS Act 2006 governing the provision of GP and other primary care services require providers to comply with specified requirements concerning confidentiality.

Individual health professionals are also governed by the standards set under the professional regulatory regime that applies to their profession.

Right

“You have the right of access to your own health records. These will always be used to manage your treatment in your best interests.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Legislation provides that, subject to certain qualifications, individuals have a right to access personal information that relates to them and is held by a ‘data controller’ (e.g. a GP or an NHS body) – refer to section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998.

There are three rights covering informed choice:

Right

“You have the right to choose your GP practice, and to be accepted by that practice unless there are reasonable grounds to refuse, in which case you will be informed of those reasons.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The right is derived from the duties imposed on the provider of GP services by virtue of regulations made under the NHS Act 2006, in particular Schedule 6 of the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) Regulations 2004 and Schedule 5 of the National Health Service (Personal Medical Services Agreements) Regulations 2004.

Right

“You have the right to express a preference for using a particular doctor within your GP practice, and for the practice to try to comply.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The right is derived from the duties imposed on the provider of GP services by virtue of the regulations made under the NHS Act 2006, in particular Schedule 6 of the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) Regulations 2004 and Schedule 5 of the National Health Service (Personal Medical Services Agreements) Regulations 2004.

Right

“You have the right to make choices about your NHS care and to information to support these choices. The options available to you will develop over time and depend on your individual needs.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

Directions given by the Secretary of State under section 8 of the NHS Act 2006 require primary care trusts to ensure that patients have the choice of provider for their NHS care when referred for their first outpatient appointment with a service led by a consultant. The Directions will come into force on 1 April 2009.

The Directions specify which services are covered by these arrangements, and which are not.

The Directions also require primary care trusts to promote choice in their area, and how the patient should complain if they have been denied the right. Details of complaints received and action taken will be publicised and reported to the strategic health authority.

The Directions specify which services are covered by these arrangements, and which are not.

The Directions require primary care trusts to publicise and promote information about secondary care providers and where that information may be accessed by their local population. This information should support their local population in choosing the provider of their first outpatient appointment with a service led by a consultant.

The Directions also require primary care trusts to publicise and promote the right to choice and information in their area, and how the patient should complain if they have been denied the right.

Details of complaints received and action taken will be publicised and reported to the strategic health authority.

There are two rights covering involvement in your healthcare and in the NHS:

Right

“You have the right to be involved in discussions and decisions about your healthcare, and to be given information to enable you to do this.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

GP services are provided under arrangements made with primary care trusts. Those arrangements must comply with requirements set out in regulations made under the NHS Act 2006. In particular, the relevant regulations define the core “essential services” that providers must or may provide, as services for patients “delivered in the manner determined by the practice in discussion with the patient” (regulation 15 of the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) Regulations 2004).

In addition, in relation to both GP and secondary care (e.g. hospital treatment), doctors registered with the General Medical Council have a duty to work in partnership with patients, which must include listening to patients and responding to their concerns and preferences, and giving patients the information they want or need in a way they can understand (refer to the General Medical Council’s *Good Medical Practice*).

Other health professionals are also governed by the standards set under the professional regulatory regime that applies to their profession.

Right

“You have the right to be involved, directly or through representatives, in the planning of healthcare services, the development and consideration of proposals for changes in the way those services are provided, and in decisions to be made affecting the operation of those services.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The legislation governing the NHS imposes a duty on NHS bodies to make arrangements with a view to securing such public involvement in relation to the services for which they are responsible (section 242 of the NHS Act 2006).

There are five rights covering complaint and redress:

Right

“You have the right to have any complaint you make about NHS services dealt with efficiently and to have it properly investigated.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The right is derived from the legislation governing the NHS complaints procedure, which sets out various obligations on NHS bodies in relation to the handling of complaints (National Health Service (Complaints) Regulations 2004).

In addition, regulations under the NHS Act 2006 governing the provision of GP and other primary care services require providers to have a complaints procedure.

Right

“You have the right to know the outcome of any investigation into your complaint.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The regulations governing the NHS complaints procedure impose a duty on NHS bodies to provide a written response (regulation 13 of the National Health Service (Complaints) Regulations 2004).

Right

“You have the right to take your complaint to the independent Health Service Ombudsman, if you are not satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with by the NHS.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

This right is derived from the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993.

The Ombudsman will not investigate your complaint if you have not invoked and exhausted the NHS complaints procedures, unless under the circumstances it is not reasonable to expect you to have invoked or exhausted those procedures.

Right

“You have the right to make a claim for judicial review if you think you have been directly affected by an unlawful act or decision of an NHS body.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

This right is derived from administrative law. It is not a right of appeal, but is concerned with the lawfulness of a decision or policy.

Right

“You have the right to compensation where you have been harmed by negligent treatment.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Source of the right

The law of negligence (refer to page 120).

Staff rights

1. "Have a good working environment with flexible working opportunities, consistent with the needs of patients and with the way that people live their lives."

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To fair treatment regarding leave, rights and flexible working and other statutory leave requests relating to work and family, including caring for adults that you live with.

Source of the right

Employment Act 2002, Employment Rights Act 1996 (Part VIII), Maternity and Parental Leave Regulations 1999, Working Time Regulations 1998, Flexible Working Regulations 2002, Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and Work and Families Act 2006

Right

To request other 'reasonable' time off for emergencies (paid and unpaid) and other statutory leave (subject to exceptions).

Source of the right

Section 57A of the Employment Rights Act 1996

Right

To expect reasonable steps are taken by the employer to ensure protection from less favourable treatment by fellow employees, patients and others (e.g. bullying or harassment).

Source of the right

Section 4A of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, section 3A of the Race Relations Act 1976, regulation 5 of the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, regulation 5(1) of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, section 3(B) of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Protection from Harassment Act 1997

2. “Have a fair pay and contract framework.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To pay; consistent with the National Minimum Wage or alternative contractual agreement.

Source of the right

National Minimum Wage Act 1998 and regulations made under the Act of 1999

May also exist in the terms and conditions of an employee’s contract

To fair treatment regarding pay.

Source of the right

Section 1 of the Equal Pay Act 1970

3. “Be involved and represented in the workplace.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To be accompanied by either a Trade Union official or a work colleague at disciplinary or grievance hearings in line with legislation, your employer’s policies or your contractual rights.

Source of the right

Sections 10 and 11 of the Employment Relations Act 1999

Section 13(5) of the Employment Relations Act 1999

Section 37 of the Employment Relations Act 2004

Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Resolution) Regulations 2004

Right

To consultation and representation either through the Trade Union or other staff representatives (for example where there is no Trade Union in place) in line with legislation, and any collective agreements that may be in force.

Source of the right

Information and Consultation of Employees Regulations 2004

Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 and Regulations made pursuant to it

Regulations 11–16 of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 if there is a transfer of a function between employers

4. “Have healthy and safe working conditions and an environment free from harassment, bullying or violence.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To work within a healthy and safe workplace and an environment in which the employer has taken all practical steps to ensure the workplace is free from verbal or physical violence from patients, the public or staff, to work your contractual hours, take annual leave and to take regular breaks from work.

Source of the right

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and associated regulations made under the Act

Working Time Regulations 1998 (for provisions relating to leave)

5. “Be treated fairly, equally and free from discrimination.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To a working environment (including practices on recruitment and promotion) free from unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, age or religion or belief.

Source of the right

Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976, Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

6. “Can raise an internal grievance and if necessary seek redress, where it is felt that a right has not been upheld.”

(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution)

Right

To have disciplinary and grievance procedures conducted appropriately and within internal and legal requirements.

Source of the right

Employment Act 2002 (Part 3), Employment Act 2002 (Dispute Resolution) Regulations 2004

Right

To appeal against wrongful dismissal.

Source of the right

Employment Rights Act 1996 or common law right to claim for breach of contract for wrongful dismissal

Right

If internal processes fail to overturn a dismissal, you have the right to pursue a claim in the employment tribunal, if you meet required criteria.

Source of the right

Section 108 of the Employment Rights Act 1996

Right

To protection from detriment in employment and the right not to be unfairly dismissed for ‘whistleblowing’ or reporting wrongdoing in the workplace.

Source of the right

Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998

7. Have employment protection (NHS employees only).**8. Can join the NHS Pension Scheme (NHS employees and some other groups, e.g. GPs).****Right**

You have a right to employment protection in terms of continuity of service for redundancy purposes if moving between NHS employers.

Source of the right

Employment Protection (Continuity of Employment of National Health Service Employees) (Modification) Order 1996

Also section 218(8) of the Employment Rights Act 1996

Redundancy Payments (National Health Service) (Modification) Order 1993

Right

You have rights relating to the ability to join the NHS Pension Scheme.

Source of the right

Rights conferred by the NHS Pension Scheme Regulations, including the National Health Service (Pension Scheme, Injury Benefits and Compensation for Premature Retirement) Amendment Regulations 2003. Note that the new National Health Service Pension Scheme Regulations 2008 apply to those staff who started on or after 1 April 2008.

Staff legal duties

Duty

“To accept professional accountability and maintain the standards of professional practice as set by the appropriate regulatory body applicable to your profession or role.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Where it exists in law

As stated in relevant guidance or regulations of regulatory bodies

Duty

“To take reasonable care of health and safety at work for you, your team and others, and to co-operate with employers to ensure compliance with health and safety requirements.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Where it exists in law

Health and Safety at Work Act 1974

Duty

“To act in accordance with the express and implied terms of your contract of employment”, e.g. the express terms regarding hours, place and duties of work, annual and sickness absence provisions, equality and diversity policies, etc., and also the implied duty of mutual trust and confidence, the duty to serve and work for the employer, exercise reasonable skill and competence when undertaking your duties, to obey reasonable and lawful orders, to adhere to the duty of fidelity towards the employer.

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Where it exists in law

Section 1 of the Employment Rights Act 1996

Duty

“Not to discriminate against patients or staff and to adhere to equal opportunities and equality and human rights legislation.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Where it exists in law

Sex Discrimination Act 1975, Race Relations Act 1976, Disability Discrimination Act 1995, Human Rights Act 1998, Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003, Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006, Equality Act 2006, Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007

Where your human rights are concerned (e.g. Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) (right to life)), discrimination may be contrary to Article 14 of the ECHR.

Proceedings may be brought in the county court under:

- (a) section 57 of the Race Relations Act 1976;
- (b) section 66 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975;
- (c) section 25 of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995; or
- (d) regulation 20 of the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2007.

Judicial review of a discriminatory decision or policy. If discrimination amounts to a breach of Article 14 ECHR, claim for damages under the Human Rights Act 1998.

Duty

“To protect the confidentiality of personal information that you hold unless to do so would put anyone at risk of significant harm.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Where it exists in law

Data Protection Act 1998

Also covered in professional conduct guidance

Duty

“To be honest and truthful in applying for a job and in carrying out that job.”

[\(Click here to go to this section of the NHS Constitution\)](#)

Where it exists in law

The duty to be honest and truthful is an implied duty of trust and confidence in the employment relationship, which emanates from common law.

The duty to declare criminal convictions exists in the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 and the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions) Order 1975.

Glossary

Administrative law – the branch of law that governs public bodies (including NHS bodies) in the exercise of their functions.

Care Quality Commission – the safety and quality regulator (or watchdog) of the healthcare and adult social care services from April 2009. The Commission's website is www.cqc.org.uk.

Common law – the law derived from decisions of the courts, rather than Acts of Parliament or other legislation.

ECHR – the European Convention on Human Rights. It is unlawful for a public body to act incompatibly with the rights conferred by the Convention (section 6 of the Human Rights Act 1998).

Judicial review – a type of court proceeding in which a judge reviews the lawfulness of an act or decision or action of a public body. Judicial review is therefore a procedure by which you can challenge a decision of the Secretary of State or an NHS body, on the basis that it is unlawful. Judicial review is not a form of appeal and is concerned primarily with how decisions are made, rather than the merits of the decision itself. To be entitled to make a claim for judicial review, a person must have a direct, personal interest in the action of decision under challenge. For further guidance on applying for judicial review, refer to 'Notes for guidance on applying for judicial review' published on Her Majesty's Courts Service website – www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk/cms/1220.htm.

Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) – LINKs are made up of individuals and community groups who work together to improve local services. Their job is to find out what the public like and dislike about local health and social care. They will then work with the people who plan and run these services to improve them. This may involve talking directly to healthcare professionals about a service that is not being offered or suggesting ways that an existing service could be made better. LINKs also have powers to help with the tasks and to make sure changes happen. To find your local LINK, contact your local authority or visit Directgov – www.direct.gov.uk/localinvolvementnetworks.

Monitor – the regulator for NHS foundation trusts.

NHS Act 2006 – the National Health Service Act 2006. The main piece of legislation governing the NHS in England, which sets out the powers and duties of the Secretary of State and provides for the establishment and functions of NHS bodies. The Act replaces earlier NHS Acts (e.g. the National Health Service Act 1977 and the Health Act 1999).

NHS complaints process – the complaints process provided for by legislation; in particular, regulations made under the NHS Act 2006 and section 113 of the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act 2003. A complaint should initially be made to the relevant NHS body – e.g. in relation to your treatment in hospital, to the NHS trust or NHS foundation trust that manages the hospital. The regulations require each NHS body to have a process for handling and considering complaints. If an individual is not satisfied with the outcome, a complaint may ultimately be taken to the Health Service Commissioner. The Commissioner (also known as the Health Service Ombudsman) carries out independent investigations of complaints about the NHS in England – further information at www.ombudsman.org.uk/index.html.

PCT – primary care trust. The NHS body with responsibility for delivering healthcare services and health improvement to a local area.

Third sector – describes the range of organisations that occupy the space between the state and the private sector. These include small local community and voluntary groups, registered charities (both large and small), foundations and trusts, as well as social enterprises and co-operatives.

For further information on the NHS system, refer to the *Statement of NHS Accountability* at www.dh.gov.uk/nhsconstitution.

THE STATEMENT OF NHS Accountability

for England
21 January 2009



Introduction

The NHS Constitution commits the Government to providing a statement of NHS accountability which describes the system of responsibility and accountability for taking decisions in the NHS. This document accompanies the NHS Constitution and provides a summary of the current structure and functions of the NHS in England.

The NHS is a system of organisations responsible for organising and providing a comprehensive health service. The NHS is founded on the principles of access being equal for all, and services being free at the point of use and based on clinical need, not ability to pay.

The funding for running the NHS is granted to the Department of Health by Parliament out of national taxation. There is therefore a continuous thread of accountability to the Government running throughout the NHS. The Secretary of State for Health is accountable to Parliament, and through Parliament to the voters, for the promotion of a comprehensive health service and for the use of public money. Any decision taken by ministers in relation to health policy can be scrutinised by Members of Parliament.

The NHS in England currently spends around £100 billion a year – equivalent to nearly £2,000 per person on average. The majority of the funding granted to the Department of Health by Parliament is allocated directly to local organisations known

as primary care trusts, which use it to commission services for their population (refer to the section on primary care trusts on page 9).

This Statement of Accountability describes how the NHS in England works and who is responsible for its different parts. Responsibility for healthcare in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is devolved to the Scottish Executive, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively. However, the governments of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have signed up to a set of common principles. The fundamental principles of the NHS are therefore the same across the United Kingdom.

'Commissioning'

Primary care trusts are responsible for assessing the needs of their local population and putting in place NHS services to meet those needs. This process is called 'commissioning'.

Roles and responsibilities

NHS services – Provider organisations

A range of organisations provide NHS services direct to patients, including:

- hospital trusts;
- mental health trusts;
- ambulance trusts;
- GP practices;
- dental practices;
- community pharmacies;
- optical practices; and
- NHS Direct.

All organisations that provide care for NHS patients are responsible for ensuring that their services meet appropriate levels of safety and quality.

Most NHS services are provided by 'NHS bodies', which are part of the public sector. There are also many other types of organisation involved in providing NHS care, including providers from the independent sector or third sector. For example,

pharmacies tend to be independent sector organisations, and most GPs and dentists have traditionally worked as contractors for the NHS, either individually or in partnerships. The third sector includes organisations such as local community groups, voluntary groups, registered charities, social enterprises and co-operatives. All organisations contracted to provide NHS services must meet the NHS's required levels of care.

There are two main ways in which organisations providing care for NHS patients are held to account for the quality of their services:

1. By the local primary care trust, which generally has the power to end the contract with the provider or to commission services from elsewhere; and
2. By the regulators. The role of the regulators is explained below.

GP practices

The family doctor or general practitioner (GP) is the first point of contact with the health service for most people. Most people are registered with a GP practice and have an ongoing relationship with that practice. GPs diagnose and treat a range of conditions, help people manage long-term conditions, such as diabetes, and, where necessary, refer patients to other healthcare services. The majority of practices also provide additional services such as vaccinations and immunisations, and antenatal and postnatal care. Some GP practices provide more specialist services, such as minor surgery.

There are other ways to access NHS services directly for urgent and emergency care, including NHS Direct, NHS walk-in centres, GP out-of-hours services and accident and emergency.

Dental practices

Dentists offer check-ups, advice on oral health and prevention of oral disease, as well as routine dental treatments and emergency help if you have a particular problem.

Pharmacies

Pharmacists are experts in medicines and how they work. They dispense prescriptions, provide a range of services related to specific health issues, and can give advice on healthy living and minor ailments.

NHS Direct

NHS Direct is a national service providing health advice and information 24 hours a day through a national telephone number (0845 46 47), the NHS Choices website (www.nhs.uk) and a digital TV service. NHS Direct is staffed by experienced teams of nurses and health advisors who can assess how urgently treatment might be needed and advise on the best course of action.

NHS Direct provides confidential information on:

- what to do if you or your family are feeling ill;
- particular health conditions;
- local healthcare services, such as doctors, dentists or late night opening pharmacies; and
- self-help and support organisations.

NHS trusts

NHS hospital, mental health and ambulance services are generally provided by 'trusts'. They are managed as separate organisations and are run by a board, which includes a chief executive, a chair and non-executive directors. Non-executive directors are often people with experience of the business, public or voluntary sector who usually come from the local area.

NHS foundation trusts

NHS foundation trusts are part of the NHS.

High-performing NHS trusts can apply for foundation trust status and the Government intends for all NHS trusts to become NHS foundation trusts over time. They must be well managed and financially robust to be granted NHS foundation trust status.

NHS foundation trusts provide the same kind of services as any other hospital, mental health or ambulance trust but are accountable in a different way and have greater freedoms. They were created to move decision-making from central government to local organisations and communities so that services could become more responsive to the needs and wishes of local people. This means that, unlike other NHS bodies, NHS foundation trusts are not overseen by strategic health authorities or the Department of Health but are instead regulated by an independent body called Monitor.

Like all NHS bodies, NHS foundation trusts are accountable to the primary care trusts that commission services from them. They are also accountable to their local populations through a board of governors: members of the public, patients and staff can become members of their NHS foundation trust. The membership elects the board of governors, which is made up of patients, the public and staff through locally run elections. Local stakeholders are also represented on the board of governors. The governors' role is to represent the interests of patients and the local community in the way the trust is managed.

NHS foundation trusts are financially independent organisations with greater freedom over the way they shape the healthcare services they provide. They are free to manage their own budgets. However, national standards and the legal framework for the NHS are the responsibility of ministers and apply to NHS foundation trusts just as they do to other parts of the NHS.

Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust – An example

Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust provides over 40 different healthcare services and is based across four sites: Birmingham Heartlands Hospital; Solihull Hospital; Good Hope Hospital; and Birmingham Chest Clinic.

The services provided by the Trust include general medical, surgical and accident and emergency services, as well as specialist services, such as:

- cardiology;
- dermatology;
- orthodontics;
- paediatrics;
- radiology; and
- speech and language therapy.

There are other NHS organisations working to support these providers, and to help ensure the NHS delivers the kind of care patients and the public need.

The local NHS – Primary care trusts

At the local level, the primary care trust is the key organisation responsible for ensuring there is a comprehensive range of health services for the local population.

Increasingly, primary care trusts call themselves by the name of their local area. For example, NHS Oxford is the primary care trust responsible for ensuring the provision of NHS services in the Oxford area. Primary care trusts commission healthcare services for their area. They often also directly provide some NHS services, such as community health services. Overall, they control the vast majority of the NHS budget.

Primary care trusts are responsible for improving the health and well-being of their local population. To achieve this, they are under a legal duty to work with the local authority to assess what kind of health services people need. They then commission services to meet those needs. This is done in partnership with local clinicians, who are involved in service planning and commissioning decisions.

Primary care trusts can commission services from a range of different organisations. Any service a primary care trust commissions will always be NHS-funded but it can be provided by voluntary or independent sector organisations as well as NHS organisations. Primary care trusts generally hold the providers of these services to account via contracts. Primary care trusts can ask the regulators to step in if the providers are not meeting the expected standards.

Primary care trusts are held to account by strategic health authorities. The board of the primary care trust is accountable to the board of the strategic health authority covering that region.

The health of the public, however, is not solely the responsibility of the NHS. The wider local public sector, as well as employers, and voluntary and community groups, all have a vital contribution to make. Primary care trusts work directly with other local partners such as local authorities, including children's services and housing services, to promote and protect the health and well-being of the local population. All primary care trusts are also part of a body called a local strategic partnership, which is led by the council. This body brings together at a local level the different parts of the public sector as well as the private, community and voluntary sectors, for example, police, fire and rescue services, charity groups, local businesses and more, to co-ordinate plans and make sure the right services are delivered.

It is important that primary care trusts engage with their local populations and their partner organisations to take account of local views. There are a number of ways in which they can do this, in addition to their work with Local Involvement Networks and the local authority's overview and scrutiny

committees (see page 15). For example, they might decide to create a local membership system with members drawn from the public, or invite local councillors to sit on their board.

NHS Leeds – An example

The primary care trust in Leeds serves a population of 720,000 and has an annual budget of almost £1 billion. It commissions services from over 100 GP practices, as well as dental practices and community pharmacies. Many community health services, such as district nursing, are commissioned from the primary care trust's arm's-length provider. NHS Leeds commissions hospital and specialist care from a range of providers, including:

- Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust;
- Leeds Partnership NHS Foundation Trust;
- Harrogate & District NHS Foundation Trust;
- Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust; and
- the independent sector.

The regional NHS – Strategic health authorities

Strategic health authorities are the regional headquarters of the NHS and carry out functions delegated to them by the Secretary of State. They are accountable for the performance and management of the healthcare system. Each strategic health authority is responsible for ensuring that patients have access to high-quality services in its area. Strategic health authorities oversee the performance of primary care trusts and NHS trusts, and are responsible for supporting NHS trusts to reach foundation trust status. They hold primary care trusts to account and are themselves directly accountable to the Department of Health.

There are 10 strategic health authorities covering regions across England. For example, NHS Yorkshire and Humber is responsible for overseeing all the NHS services in that region.

The national level – The Department of Health

The Department of Health is a government department. Its overall aim is to improve the health and well-being of the people of England. To do this it:

- develops the strategy and direction for the healthcare system;
- develops the legislative framework; and
- secures and allocates resources for healthcare services.

The Department is accountable to Parliament and the public. The Department does not lead on the day-to-day running and organisation of health services.

The Department of Health is made up of civil servants who advise the Secretary of State for Health and other ministers on health policy. The Secretary of State is a politician and is the Cabinet minister responsible for health in England. He or she takes decisions on national health policy.

The Chief Executive of the NHS sits in the Department of Health and is responsible for delivery and leadership in the healthcare system on behalf of the Secretary of State. The Chief Executive is the chief policy adviser to ministers on NHS matters.

The Department also has responsibilities beyond the NHS, including:

- setting the strategic framework for adult social care; and
- taking the lead on issues such as environmental hazards to health, infectious diseases, health promotion and education, the safety of medicines, and ethical issues in health and social care.

Independent regulators

The NHS is underpinned by a system of regulation, which is independent from government and from the NHS itself. It is there to ensure that the care patients receive is safe and of acceptable quality. The regulators also make sure the bodies or healthcare professionals they regulate are sound and fit for purpose.

Care Quality Commission

From April 2009, the safety and quality regulator for all health services will be the Care Quality Commission. The Care Quality Commission will also regulate adult social care services.

The Care Quality Commission's principal functions in relation to healthcare will be to:

- register healthcare providers (whether or not they provide services for the NHS);
- monitor compliance with registration requirements and, if necessary, use its enforcement powers to ensure all service providers meet those requirements;
- review and publish comparative information on organisations providing and commissioning healthcare, and undertake reviews or studies of particular types of care; and
- monitor the operation of the Mental Health Act and Mental Capacity Act.

The Care Quality Commission will publish independent assessments of how organisations are performing by drawing on a range of sources of information, including what patients and the public tell them. It will also report annually to Parliament on how the health and social care systems are working overall.

The Care Quality Commission will have the power to inspect all registered healthcare providers. It will also have the power to suspend services, impose fines, prosecute or deregister organisations if it has evidence that suggests a serious problem that may be putting patients at risk.

Monitor

Unlike NHS trusts, which are overseen by strategic health authorities, NHS foundation trusts are regulated by Monitor, an independent regulator. NHS foundation trusts are assessed by the Care Quality Commission in the same way as other hospitals.

NHS trusts have to apply to become NHS foundation trusts. Monitor assesses and decides on their applications. It also ensures that NHS foundation trusts meet the conditions it sets for the way they operate so that they are well managed and financially robust. It has powers to intervene in the running of an NHS foundation trust to safeguard NHS patients and services.

Monitor is accountable to Parliament but independent of the Secretary of State.

Professional regulators

There are a number of regulatory bodies that are responsible for the regulation of healthcare professionals. A list is provided at the back of this document. An example is the General Medical Council, which regulates doctors.

The professional regulators are independent bodies responsible to Parliament which register and regulate the training and practice of health professionals. They safeguard the safety and the quality of the care that patients receive from health professionals. This includes dealing with concerns about misconduct raised by patients, their families or other professionals. Professional regulators certify new practitioners and ensure that they maintain standards and remain fit to practise.

Information on how to report a health professional to the relevant professional regulator is available on the website of the Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence, which provides an oversight role on professional regulation (there is a link to its website at the back of this document).

Other specialist national bodies

There are a number of national bodies involved in the provision or organisation of NHS services. They have responsibility for things which are best done or co-ordinated at the national level. Some examples are as follows:

- The NHS Blood and Transplant Authority is responsible for the supply of blood, organs, plasma and tissues across the NHS;
- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is responsible for ensuring that medicines work and are acceptably safe; and
- The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is responsible for producing national guidance on which drugs and treatments are clinically and cost effective, as well as guidance on promoting good health.

How the NHS is accountable at a local level

While the NHS is a national system that is primarily held to account nationally, there is also a range of ways in which it is accountable to patients and the public at a local level. Some of the main ways are described here.

Duty to involve and report to the public

NHS bodies are under a legal duty to involve people who use health services or their representatives in decisions about those services. This duty applies to strategic health authorities, primary care trusts, NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts. The duty applies to the planning of health services, proposals for changes in the provision of services and decisions that will affect the way services operate.

Strategic health authorities and primary care trusts are also under a legal duty to report publicly on how they have involved people in their activities and on the impact of

the consultation on their decisions. Members of the public are also able to attend the board meetings of strategic health authorities and primary care trusts.

There are opportunities to give feedback on local services through regular patient surveys.

NHS foundation trust membership

Members of the public, patients and staff can become involved in the running of their NHS foundation trust by becoming a member of it. Members are able to stand and vote in elections for governors of the NHS foundation trust. The board of governors works with the board of directors to ensure that the interests of the members are reflected in the way that the NHS foundation trust is managed. The board of directors is responsible for the day-to-day running of the trust.

By law, the board of governors:

- appoint and remove the chair and non-executive directors, and decide their pay and terms and conditions;
- approve the appointment of the chief executive; and
- must be consulted on the NHS foundation trust's annual plan.

Local Involvement Networks

Local Involvement Networks (LINKs) give citizens a voice in how their health and social care services are planned and delivered. LINKs are made up of individuals and community groups who work together to improve local health and social care services. Local authorities are responsible for making arrangements to establish LINKs but LINKs operate independently.

The role of LINKs is to find out what people want, allow them to suggest ideas for improving services, monitor local services and look into specific issues of concern to the community. Primary care trusts, NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts are legally obliged to allow LINKs representatives to enter and view their services.

NHS organisations are required to respond to recommendations made by LINKs and be clear about what actions they will take as a result.

Overview and scrutiny committees

The public's opinion can also influence local health services through the overview and scrutiny committees of local authorities. Overview and scrutiny committees are made up of elected local councillors, supported by council officials. They allow democratically elected community leaders to voice the views of their constituents and require local NHS bodies to listen and respond.

Overview and scrutiny committees have the power to scrutinise the operation and planning of local health services. They can require the NHS to provide information and explanations about how the needs of the local population are being addressed.

What to do if things go wrong

Any comments, whether positive or negative, can be fed back to the primary care trust or directly at the point of care, either to the clinician providing care or through the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). PALS are available in most hospitals and primary care trusts, and act on behalf of patients when handling concerns. The NHS has its own complaints procedure which is always the first step for any complaint about the NHS. For information on how to complain about NHS services, please refer to page 11 of the Handbook to the NHS Constitution.

Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman

If you are not satisfied with the way your complaint has been dealt with, you have the right to take your complaint to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman. The Ombudsman's services are confidential and free.

The Ombudsman conducts independent investigations into complaints that government departments, a range of other public bodies in the UK, or the NHS in England have not acted properly or fairly, or have provided a poor service.

The Ombudsman can look at complaints about the actions of providers of NHS care, as well as primary care trusts and strategic health authorities. The Ombudsman can also look at complaints about the Department of Health, the Care Quality Commission and Monitor.

The Ombudsman is accountable to Parliament and independent of government and the NHS.

How to find out more

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk

Department of Health: www.dh.gov.uk

Care Quality Commission (takes over the regulation of health and social care on 1 April 2009): www.cqc.org.uk

Monitor: www.monitor-nhsft.gov.uk

Council for Healthcare Regulatory Excellence: www.chre.org.uk

General Medical Council: www.gmc-uk.org

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (which regulates nurses, midwives and specialist community public health nurses): www.nmc-uk.org

The Health Professions Council (which regulates 13 professions, including paramedics and physiotherapists): www.hpc-uk.org

The General Dental Council (which regulates dentists, dental hygienists and dental therapists): www.gdc-uk.org

The General Optical Council (which regulates dispensing opticians and optometrists): www.optical.org

The General Chiropractic Council (which regulates chiropractors): www.gcc-uk.org

The General Osteopathic Council (which regulates osteopaths): www.osteopathy.org.uk

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (which regulates pharmacists): www.rpsgb.org.uk

LINKs: www.dh.gov.uk/en/Managingyourorganisation/PatientAndPublicinvolvement/dh_076366

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman: www.ombudsman.org.uk