



NHS Management Executive
St. Andrew's House
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

4th February 1999

Dear Colleague

THE NHS COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE: EVALUATION

Summary

1. This letter provides information on the UK-wide evaluation of the NHS complaints procedure and early warning of two stakeholder workshops. The evaluation will be undertaken by a team consisting of the London Health Economics Consortium (part of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine), the King's Fund and Public Attitude Survey. The Executive Summary of their proposal is attached.

Background

2. This will be a major piece of work – a two year research-based project across the whole of the United Kingdom. The aim of the research is to provide an evaluation of how the complaints procedure is operating across all parts of the NHS – hospital, community and primary care. It will be based as far as possible on the actual experience of those using and operating the procedure which will be used to further refine the process so that it can fully meet its original aims and principles.

Action

3. Board General Managers and NHS Trust Chief Executives are asked to bring the Executive Summary to the attention of managers responsible for complaints and conveners. They are also asked to take appropriate measures locally to ensure full co-operation with the independent researchers who will be contacting them shortly outlining their research plan.

4. Health Board General Managers are also asked to bring this letter to the attention of shadow Chief Executives.

Addressees

For action:

General Managers, Health Boards
Chief Executive, NHS Trusts

For information:

General Manager, CSA
Chief Executive, HEBS
General Manager, State Hospitals
Board for Scotland
Local Health Councils/SAHC
Chairmen of GP Sub-Committees
Health Service Commissioner
Mental Welfare Commission

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Other Information

4. You are also asked to note that 2 stakeholder workshops are to be held in Scotland on 22 and 23 April. Details of these will be sent by the researchers.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Woods', with a stylized, cursive script.

KEVIN WOODS

Director of Strategy and Performance Management

The Evaluation of the NHS Complaints Procedure

London Health Economics Consortium The Kings Fund Public Attitude Surveys (PAS)

1 Executive Summary

The research proposed is designed to provide an independent evaluation of the procedures that came into effect on 1st April 1996 for dealing with complaints about NHS treatments and services. The study will investigate how these new procedures are operating across all parts of the NHS - hospital, community and family health services (FHS) and throughout the United Kingdom - and will seek to meet the information needs of policy makers and managers concerned with the future development of the system. The main focus of the research will be on the experiences of those using and operating the procedures.

1.1 The research team

The members of the research team offer not only extensive experience of completing multi-site research studies of the type proposed here, but also an in-depth knowledge of the issues under scrutiny and of the health care climate in which the new procedures are being operationalised. Their combined experience of research in health care provision, from the perspectives of both staff and patients/clients, means that the methodological, intellectual and organisational challenges of the proposed study will be met effectively.

A particular strength of the team is that the professional research expertise and substantive knowledge of the core team members will be complemented by the considerable capacity at PAS for cost-effective data collection and analysis, covering all four countries of the UK. Using the PAS network of trained interviewers based across the countries means that a very high level coverage is possible at comparatively low cost. The PAS staff who will administer the postal questionnaires, undertake some of the interviews and analyse the data have considerable experience of completing this type of work.

1.2 The research

In undertaking this research we will utilise several methods as follows:

- Conduct a series of stakeholder workshops across the UK i.e. two in each of Scotland, N.Ireland and Wales and three in England (potentially Leeds and London). Prior to the workshops, participants will be sent a short questionnaire for completion and their responses used as the basis for discussion in the workshops.
- Utilise relevant statistical data collected centrally supplemented by local data to develop an epidemiology of complaints
- Conduct a very large number of face-to-face interviews with a variety of staff and patients/clients and others involved in the complaints process
- Send questionnaires to a wide sample of patients/clients and other stakeholders, drawing on the data collected in the interviews. Those to Health Authorities will seek any additional statistical information about complaints and performance not recorded centrally.

- **Collect a sample of complaints procedures for detailed analysis**
- **Analyse all the data focusing on processes, outcomes and performance**
- **Conduct interviews with more staff and patients/clients to investigate issues identified in the data collected in the earlier phases of the work.**
- **Produce an interim and final report and make presentations of the findings, as appropriate.**