

Complaints / Compliments

Annual Report

2021-22



COMPLAINTS / COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2021-22

WORKING TOGETHER

EXCELLENCE

OPENNESS & HONESTY

COMPASSION

Introduction

This report gives an overview of complaints and other feedback received from patients, their carers and family members by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022.

The Belfast Trust is one of the largest integrated health and social care Trusts in the United Kingdom.

We deliver treatment and care to approximately 358,000 citizens in Belfast and provide the majority of regional specialist services to all of Northern Ireland. We have a workforce of more than 20,000 staff (full time & part time). Belfast Trust also comprises the major teaching and training hospitals in Northern Ireland.

Our vision is to be one of the safest, most effective and compassionate health and social care organisations, and we recognise the importance and value of service users' opinions regarding the treatment and care we provide. As such we work to have effective processes for managing concerns, complaints and compliments about any aspect of care or treatment provided or commissioned by the Belfast Trust in hospital or community settings.

The Trust received a total of

1,465
formal complaints
during the past year,

and **8,969**
formally reported compliments
about our services.

Although most patients have positive experiences of our services there may be times when treatment or care do not meet expectations especially when something has gone wrong or fallen below standard.

We are focused on making sure that lessons from complaints are taken on board and followed up appropriately, sharing these lessons across other Service Areas and Health and Social Care Trusts where the learning can be applied in settings beyond the original ward / department.

By listening to people about their experience of healthcare, the Trust can identify new ways to improve the quality and safety of services and prevent similar problems happening in the future.

How we listen

**IF YOU HAVE A
COMPLAINT
ABOUT OUR
SERVICES, WE
WANT TO HEAR
FROM YOU!**

Anyone who uses any of our services can complain. You can also complain on someone else's behalf (you will generally need their written consent to do so).

Your complaint will be investigated thoroughly and confidentially. We aim to respond to your complaint in full within 20 working days, to address your concerns and let you know of any actions taken as a result.

Some complaints may however take longer to resolve than others. We will contact you to explain if this is the case with your complaint, and we will continue to keep in touch with you while we work to provide you with a response.

What we do

During 2021-22 some of our average weekly activity across the Trust included:

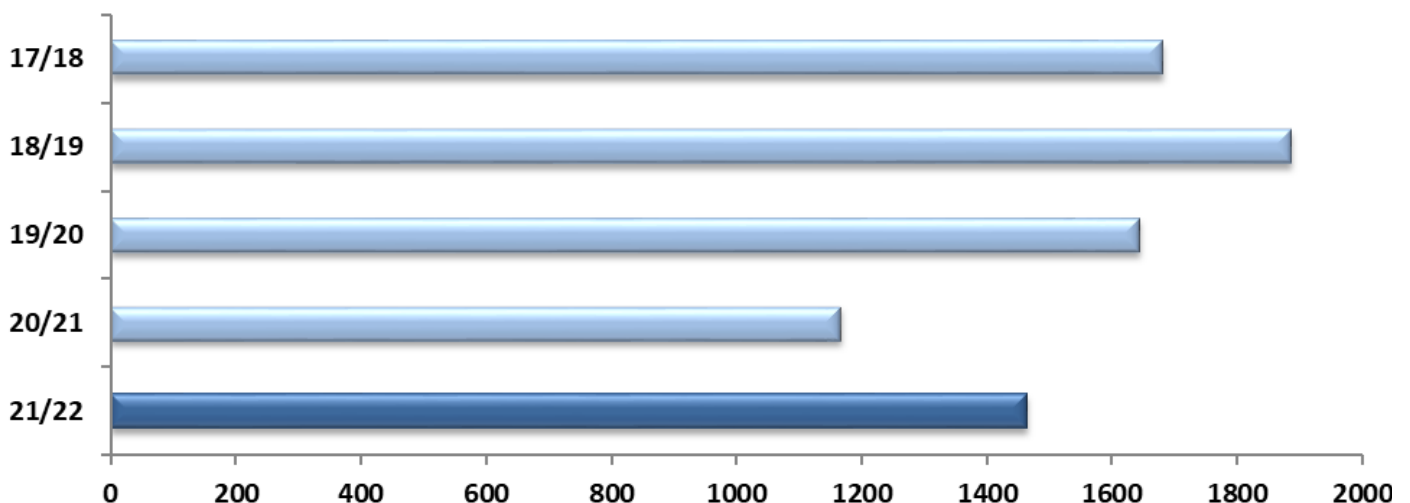
- 3,421 attendances at our Emergency Departments
- 177 Emergency Surgery procedures
- 6,813 face-to-face Outpatient Attendances
- 3,116 virtual Outpatient Attendances
- 924 Non-Elective Admissions
- 273 Elective Admissions
- 813 Day Cases
- 182 Scope Procedures

Friends and Family Test

Based on 6,741 inpatients surveyed between April 2021 - March 2022 on the Trust's acute hospital sites:

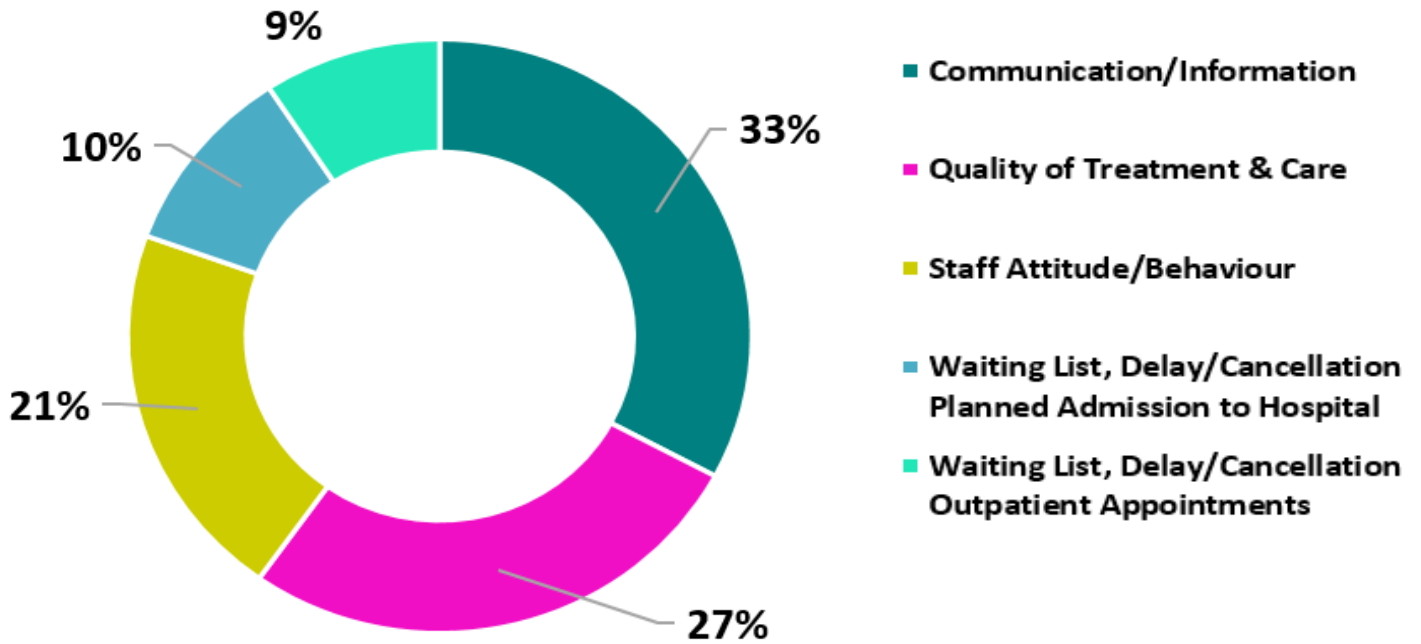
98.6% of patients were likely or extremely likely to recommend the care & treatment they received to a friend or family member

Formal Complaints received during the past 5 years

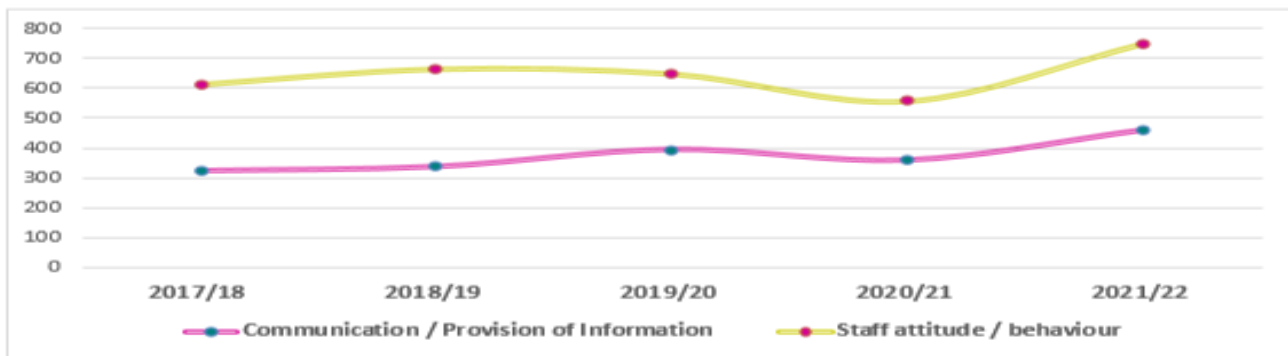


What you said

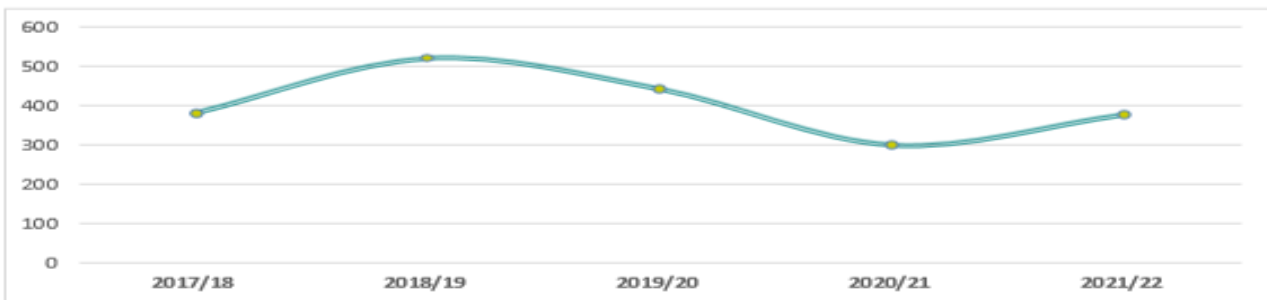
The most frequent reasons for complaints about our services during 2021-22 are shown below:



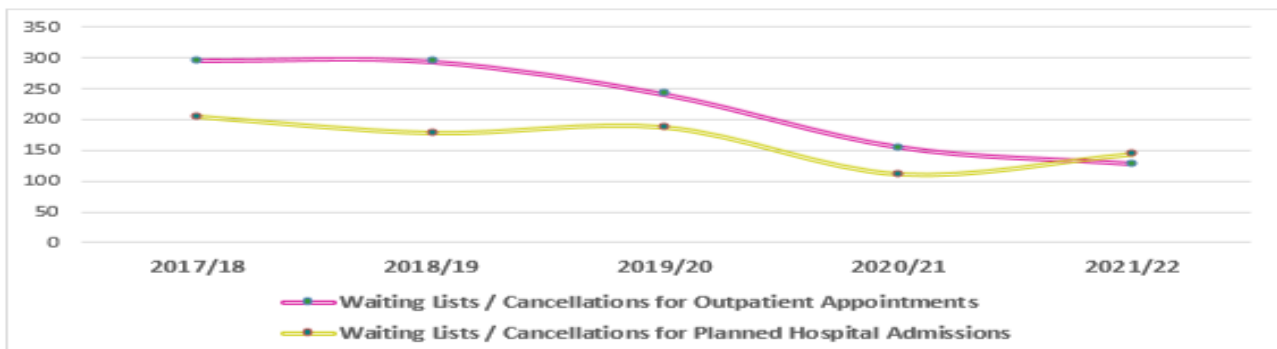
Numbers of complaints about Staff attitude and behaviour, and Communication / Information provided:



Numbers of complaints about Quality of Treatment and care received:



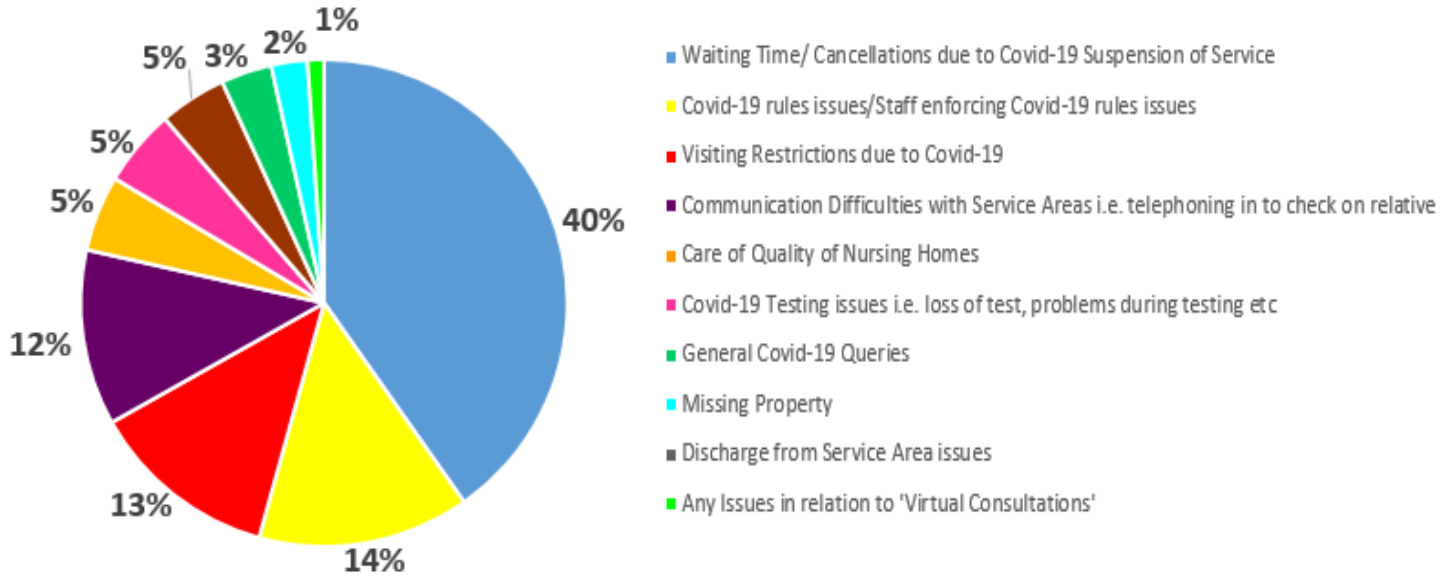
Numbers of complaints received about waiting lists / cancelled services:



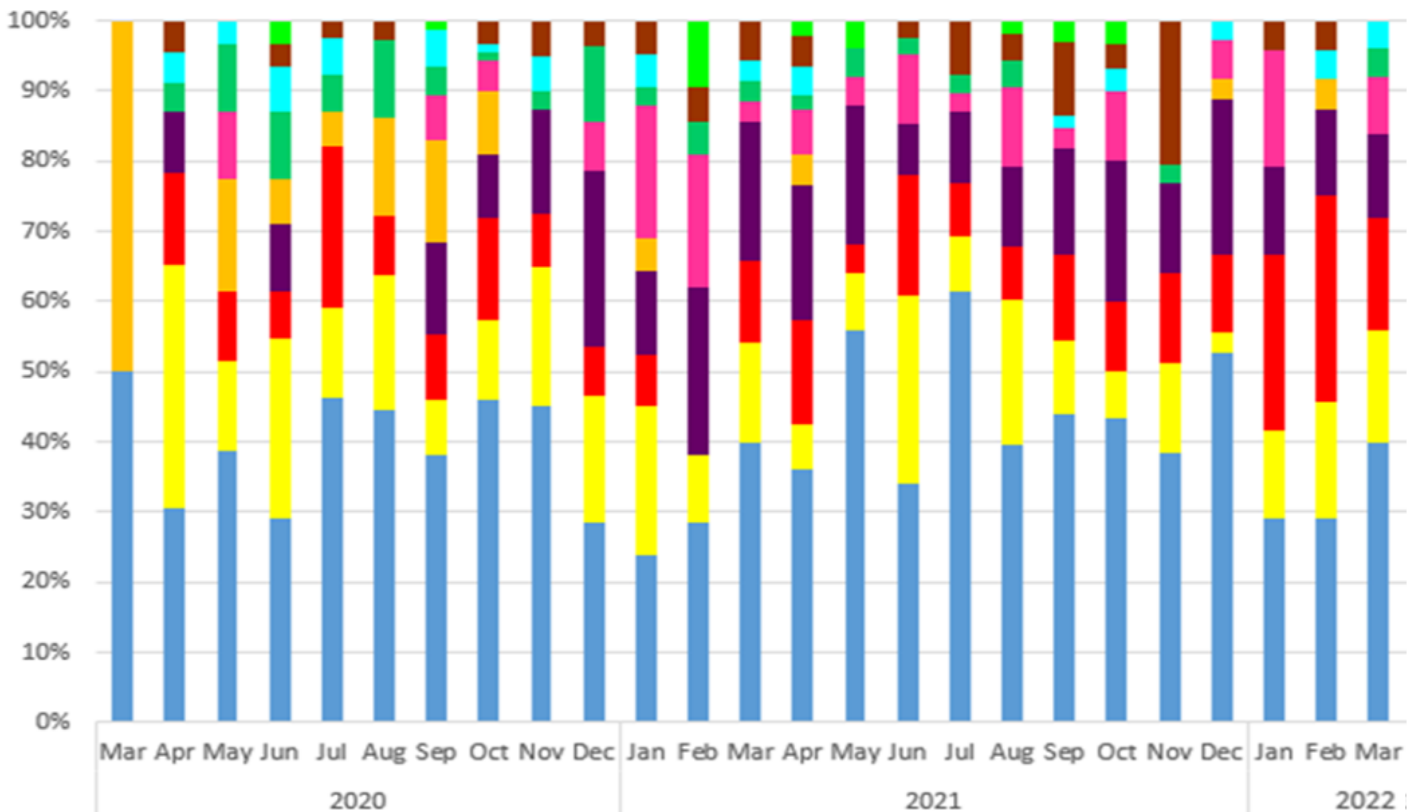
Complaints Data Review: Covid-19 Two Years On

A total of **315** concerns/ issues were raised in relation to COVID-19 during 2021-22. This figure includes any concerns/issues included in formal complaints, frontline complaints, and general enquiries that were reported to the Complaints Department.

Covid-related complaint issues received during the year were categorised as follows:



The areas being complained about in relation to Covid changed as the pandemic situation developed, and the chart below shows how the issues causing concern changed throughout the 2020-21 and 2021-22 years:



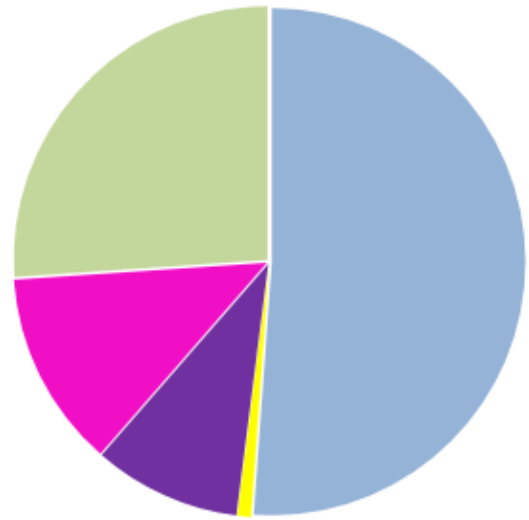
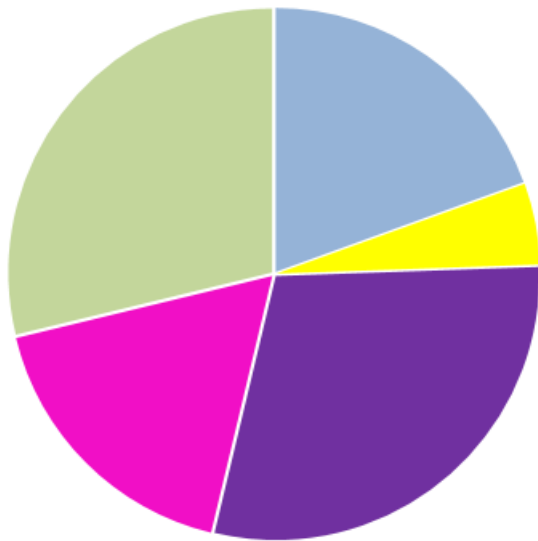
The Trust again sincerely thanks service users and their loved ones for their consideration and patience regarding the operation of our complaints processes during 2021-22 on any occasion where the pressures and demands of Covid-19 on staff meant that our responses to complaints were delayed.

What you said

The services provided by Belfast Health and Social Care Trust are organised into Directorates. Each year complaints and compliments are received about the clinical specialties and departments within these groupings, and the charts below show a comparative overview of these complaints grouped by Clinical Directorate in 2021-22:

Clinical Directorate Complaints

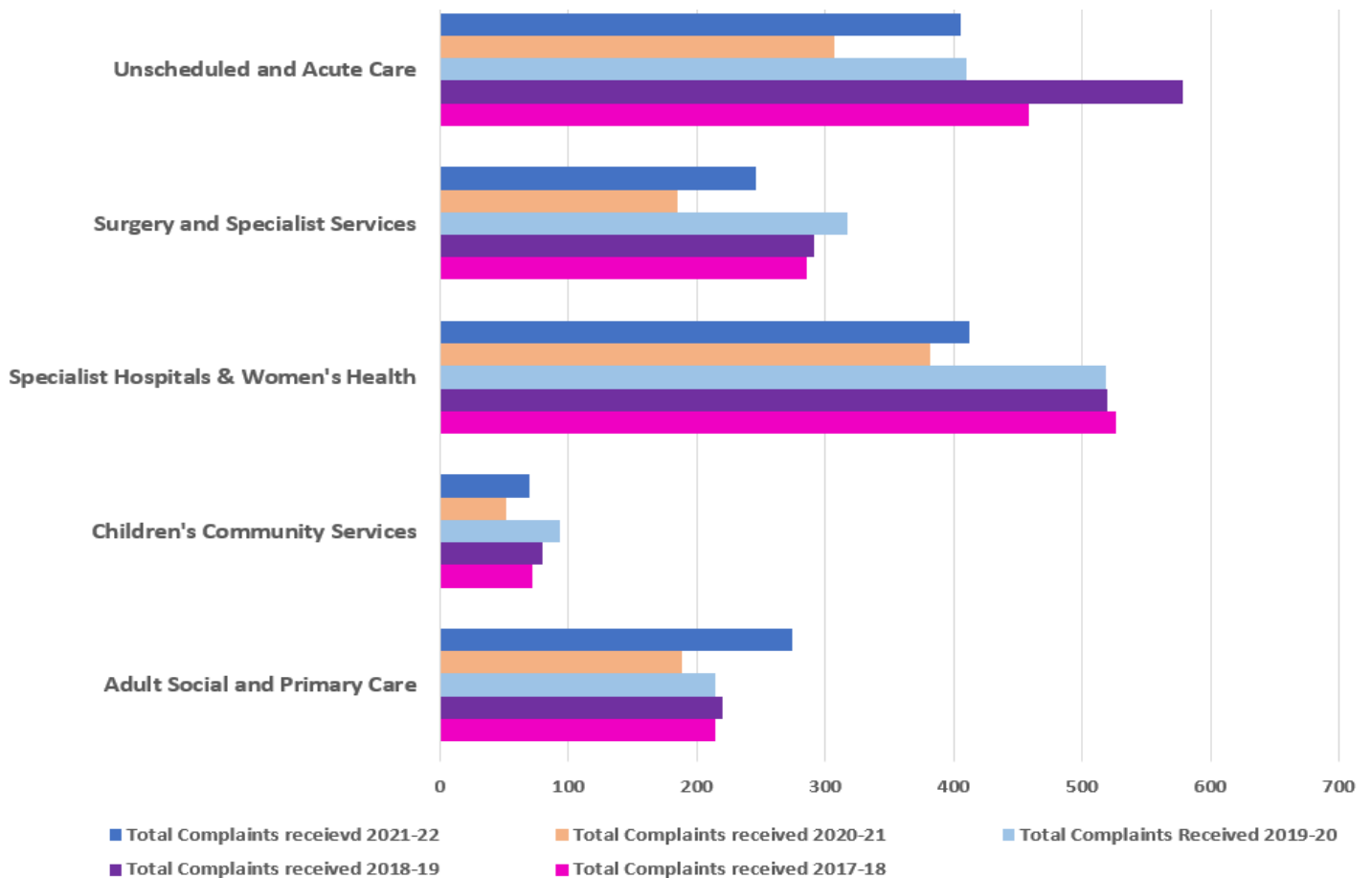
Clinical Directorate Compliments



- Adult Social and Primary Care
- Children's Community Services
- Specialist Hospitals & Women's Health
- Surgery and Specialist Services
- Unscheduled and Acute Care

Complaints

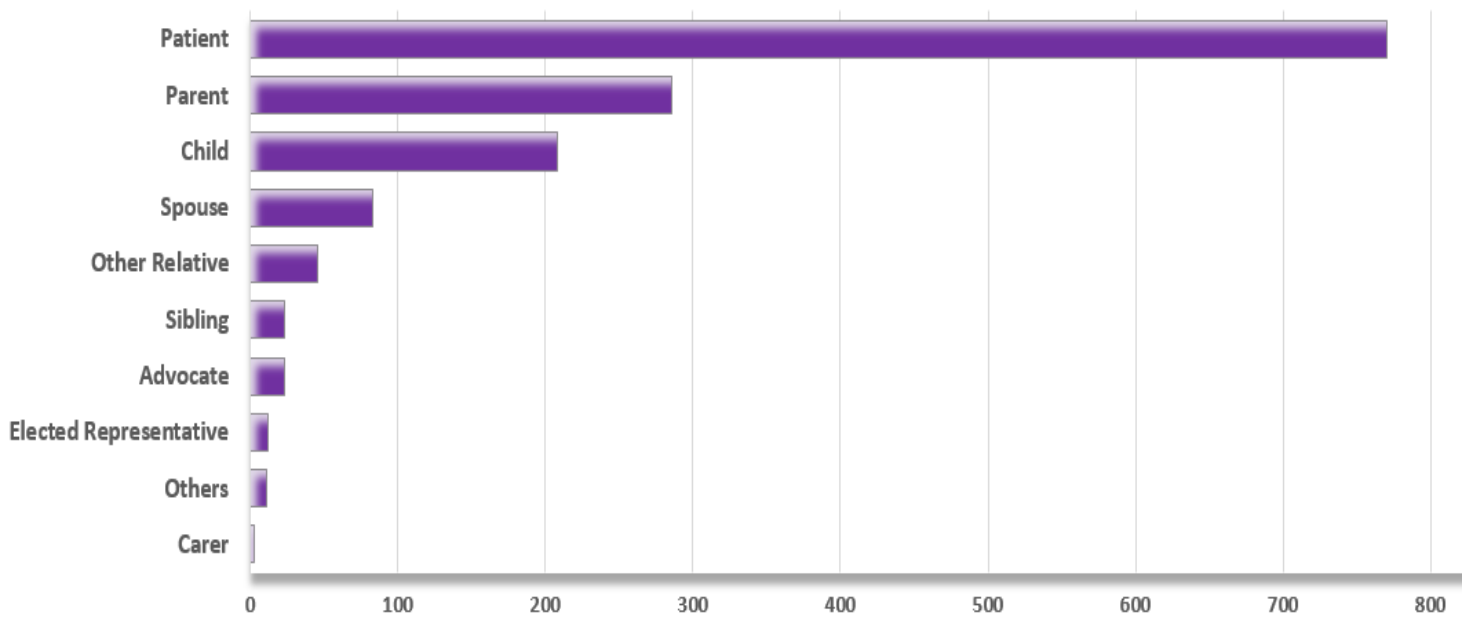
The numbers of complaints received by each area are typically proportionate to their activity levels and to the nature and complexity of the services provided, with larger clinical Directorates receiving greater numbers of complaints. The distribution of **complaints across** the clinical **Directorates** over the past 5 years is shown below



Who Complains?

In 2021-22, the significant majority of complaints continued to be made by the person directly affected by the complaint issues raised.

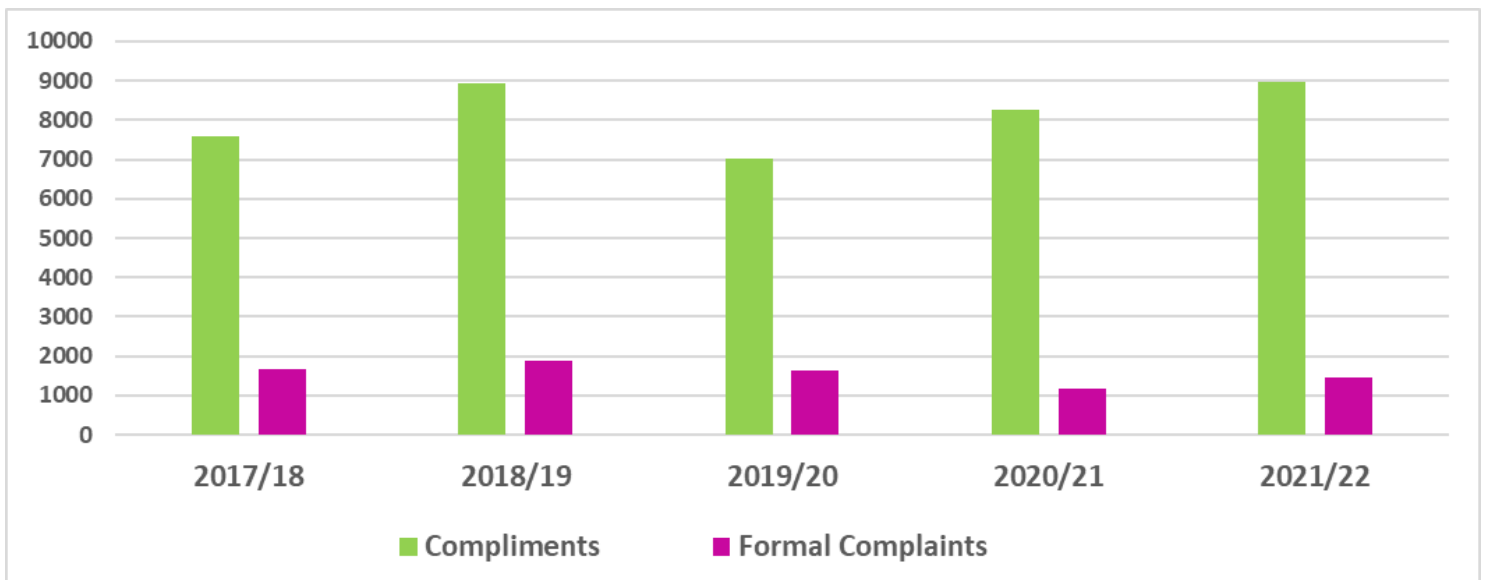
The chart below shows who raised complaints on behalf of others during this time:



Compliments

Throughout the year the Trust continued to receive compliments about many aspects of our services.

A total of **8,969** compliments were formally reported during 2021-22 and the table below shows the numbers of both complaints and compliments received over the past 5 years:



Compliments are very much valued because they provide our patients and clients with an opportunity to share their positive experiences with our staff members, and allow the Trust to learn from areas of good practice and share what is working well in one area across others.

As such we encourage service users to tell us when they have been happy with their experiences. Compliments can be shared with us by phone, face-to-face with staff, in writing, or by email via a dedicated mail box:

compliments@belfasttrust.hscni.net

Some examples of compliments received during 2021/22 are shown overleaf:

Compliments - what you said...

I would just like to acknowledge the compassion and care I received from my doctor in the fetal medicine unit in the Royal Jubilee Maternity Hospital. I was reviewed by her twice during what was a very stressful time but as soon as I walked into the room with her on both occasions I was put at ease. She was so personable, professional and thorough and I am lucky to have been treated by her!

My son had an unfortunate accident and broke bones in his right hand. He was scheduled for his operation yesterday morning so we attended Fractures first thing. Can I say the treatment he received from start to finish was exceptional. The nursing staff were all fantastic from start to finish and their interaction with him was both friendly and professional. The theatre nursing staff, surgeons and the anaesthetist were exactly the same and that made him relaxed and confident in the outcome of his surgery. In fact from the first appointment we had in fractures with the surgeon, the entire experience was excellent. Can you please pass on my gratitude and thanks to all your staff.

I would like to place on record our family's appreciation to my father's care worker for the amount of time, care and attention he has afforded us. He has acted in an extremely conscientious and professional way to support us with my father's care and well being and going the 'extra mile' returning phone calls promptly etc. and he should be commended for this.

Mum has been attending the Royal Hospital for a few years as she needed a cornea replacement. During this time the surgeon, her secretary and all the staff working at the eye clinic in the Royal have been superb. They were really helpful and friendly and as mum is 90 years old spent more time and patience explaining things to her. Her treatment was exemplary.

Mum went in for her operation in Ward 28 Royal Hospital. Her nurse was exceptional. She settled mum and it was as if no-one else was important except her. She explained what was happening and was just so good to mum. She put my mind at ease as well. When I went to collect mum, I met the nurse again, who was with mum chatting away to her, again making her feel very important and treasured. She explained all that had happened, what to expect and what we had to do, explaining the future appointments and treatment. She had already told mum, asking if she was ok with it all etc. The nurse went out of her way to ensure mum's comfort and ease and I cannot thank her enough.

This is a long overdue message of thanks to the staff in general at Belfast City Hospital, but most especially to the team which is providing me with such excellent ongoing care since I was diagnosed with a rare type of Sarcoma.

My writing to you at this time has been prompted by my recent viewing of a programme entitled 'Super Surgeons: A chance of Life', which was filmed in the world renowned Royal Marsden Hospital', London.

The care I have received and still do certainly equals that shown in the programme. From my perspective, it is even better. I consider myself very lucky and blessed to be in the care of these excellent individuals. Any requests or concerns I have are dealt with promptly. Once again, I want to thank you.

I attended the Mater Hospital DPU June 2021... I was extremely anxious and afraid.

The staff were absolutely incredible, from the minute I explained my situation, everyone went above and beyond to ensure the experience carried minimal trauma for me. From a hug from a staff nurse, to the Health Care Assistant who held my hands throughout, and the gentle, reassuring manner of the doctor... Even when I became distressed midst procedure all staff worked to settle me again.

From the second I entered the DPU to post discharge with the assistance of the fabulous student nurse, I felt secure, protected and validated. The experience was an absolute credit to the Mater and BHSCT as a whole.

How we respond - timeliness of complaint responses 2021-22

The Trust's Complaints Department supports our managers and staff working in wards and departments to help ensure that comprehensive and full responses are provided to all complaints in an appropriate and timely way.

During 2021-22 we took an average of 27.6 working days to provide responses to Complaints. Although the Trust aims to respond to complaints within 20 working days, complex complaints (particularly those that involve a range of services / departments / organisations, or where independent expert opinions are sought) can require additional time to investigate.

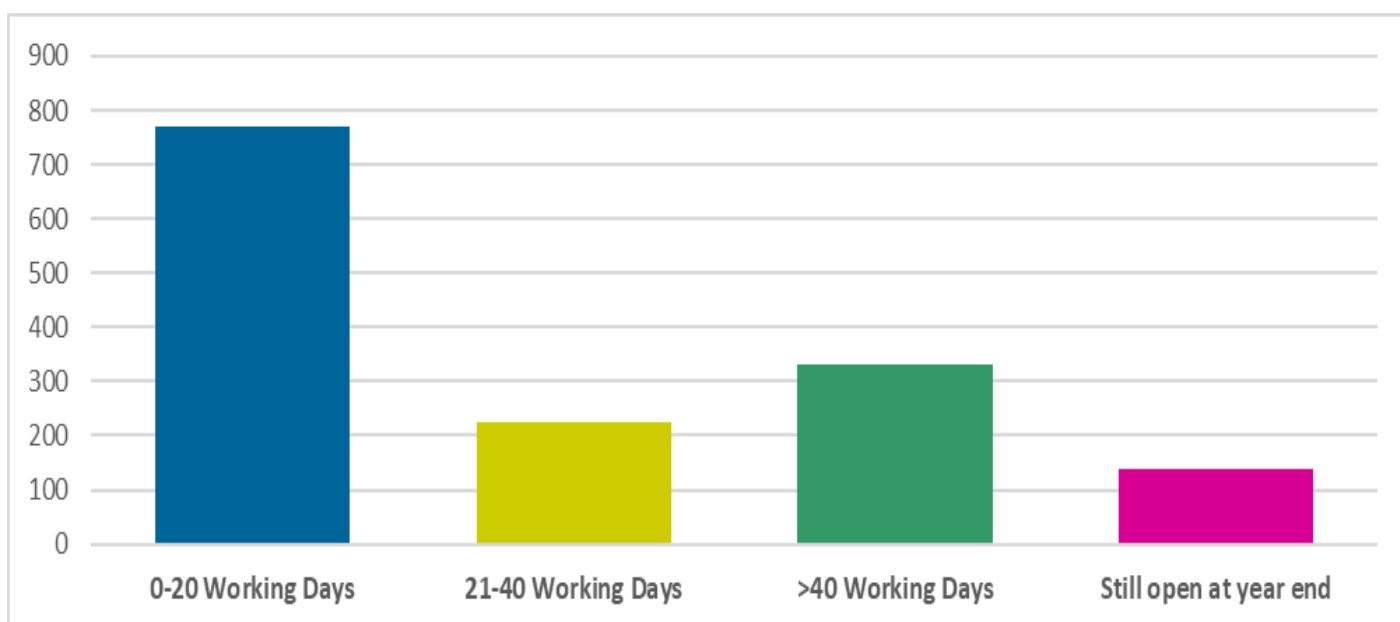
The following table shows the response times for the Trust for complaints received during 2020/21:

Acknowledgement of complaint within 2 working days	98%
Complaint response within 20 working days	52%
Complaint response within 30 working days	62%

In order to improve the timeliness of our response to complainants, we maintained our focus on long outstanding complaints during 2021/22, in particular continuing to highlight cases where investigations and work to write complaint responses had been ongoing for longer than 40 working days.

Regular reports were shared with each of the service-facing Directorates throughout the year identifying all complaint cases in each service area where a response was significantly overdue, and we also encouraged and supported staff to resolve complaints on the frontline - increasing the numbers of complaints addressed informally within wards and departments, and also increasing the numbers of formal complaints addressed within 5 working days.

The chart below gives an overview of how long we took to respond to complaints this year:



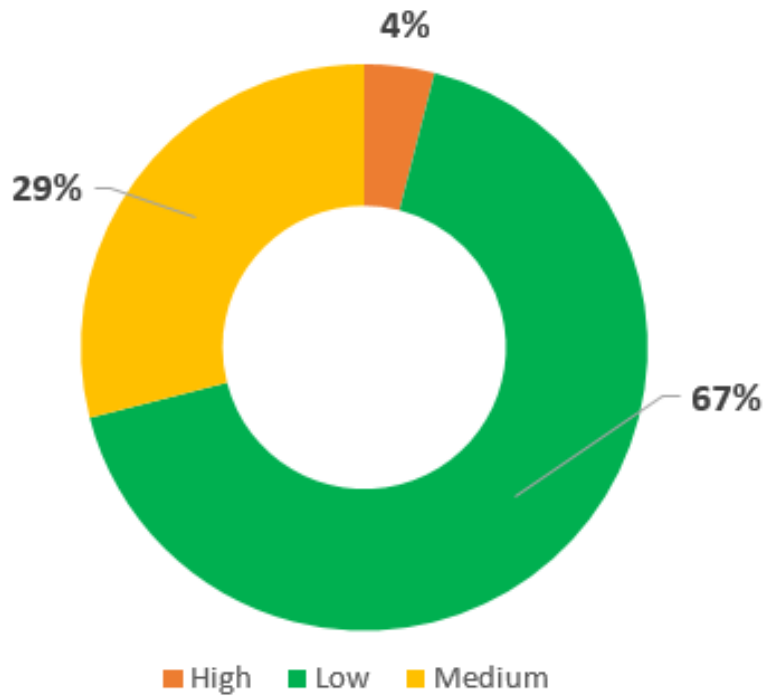
*Although we recognise the need to respond to complaints and concerns as promptly as possible, we feel that this must not be at the cost of providing a **quality** response to complainants. As such, while we continue to seek improvement in the timeliness of our replies, we acknowledge that we did not always meet our target of responding within 20 working days during 2021-22, particularly during periods of significant additional demands on staff as a result of Covid-19,*

Grading of complaints

All complaints received by the Trust are assessed against the Trust’s risk evaluation matrix and are **graded** as either Low, Medium, High or Extreme risk by the Complaints Team in conjunction with the relevant Service Area(s).

This grading determines the most appropriate action to be taken in response to the complaint, including the type of investigation to be undertaken, and notification of the issues identified to senior staff.

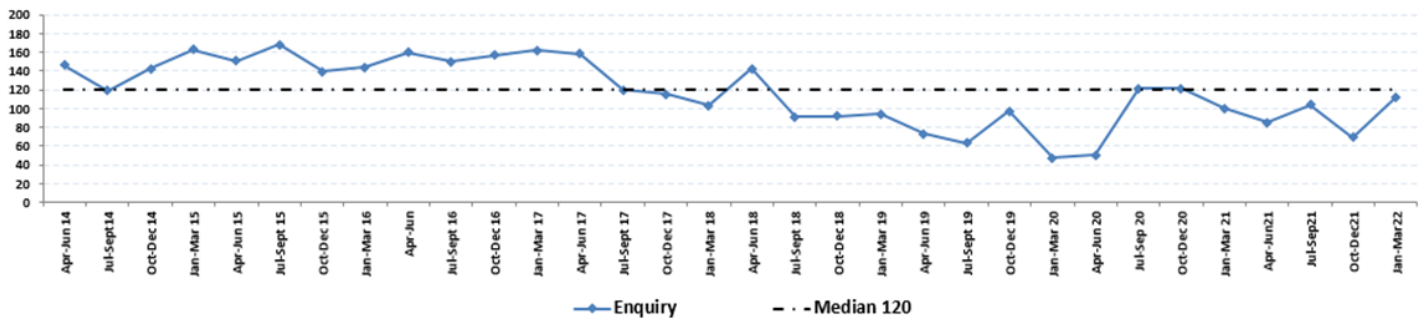
The chart opposite shows an overview of the complaints received during 2021-22 by their grade.



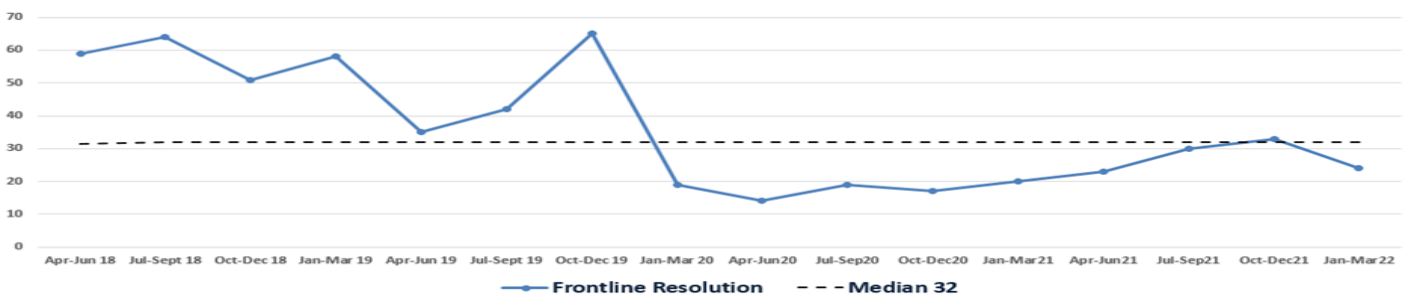
General Enquiries & Frontline Resolutions

The charts below show the number of general enquiries and service area resolutions recorded from 2014-2022.

“**General Enquiries**” received by the Complaints Team are not subject to the HSC Formal Complaint Procedure, and can generally be resolved relatively quickly. Examples include: enquiries about position on the waiting list, clients unable to contact specific wards/departments, or clients who request that their concerns are not raised as a formal complaint:



The Trust continues to promote the resolving and recording of complaints and concerns at service level e.g. in wards and departments. These cases are also monitored by the Complaints Team under a heading of “**Service Area**” or “**Frontline**” Resolution”:



Complaints Awareness Training is made available to all staff to encourage and facilitate the resolution of patients’ concerns at this frontline level. However all service users may subsequently request that their concerns are further investigated formally by the Trust under the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure.

Learning from Complaints

The Trust continues to strive to ensure that where any patient had an experience within our care that did not meet the standards that we expect, this experience is reviewed and any learning is identified and used to inform changes in the way that we deliver our services. This learning is shared across Trust wards / departments where relevant to help avoid other patients experiencing similar issues in the future.

Some examples of how complaints have led to improvements within the Trust during 2021-22 include:

Complaint 1

A complaint was received about limited information having been provided in relation to a patient's elective surgery procedure in the Belfast City Hospital (BCH). In particular, the complainant was concerned that advice and information was provided verbally rather than in writing.

Following receipt of this complaint the Trust reviewed its processes and found that although information leaflets regarding all procedures had previously been routinely posted out along with appointment letters, this practice had stopped for some procedures, including the Urology procedure undertaken by the complainant's mother. This situation was discussed with staff in the Waiting List Office and measures put in place to ensure with immediate effect, that pre-procedure patient information would be sent out for all procedures within that clinical specialty.

In response to the complainant's feedback, the Trust also investigated what written information was available on the BCH surgical wards for Urology patients regarding their procedures, aftercare and discharge. As a result of this complaint, Urology procedural information leaflets are now provided to the surgical wards in BCH. These leaflets explain what the procedure involves; expected side effects; discharge information and how to seek help and advice if a complication arises.

Complaint 2

A patient attended an outpatient clinic and was advised that a joint injection may be helpful in relation to their condition. A date was subsequently arranged for this injection however the patient contacted the Trust's appointments office to advise that this date was unsuitable.

The appointment was consequently cancelled and a note was placed on the patient's records stating 'patient will phone for further appointment'. Because of this note, the patient unfortunately was not appointed to a future clinic as the appointments staff had an understanding that the patient would contact the Trust when they were next available to attend.

As a result of the complaint, the administration team reflected on their practice and made changes to their booking system to minimise the risk of a reoccurrence in the future. Processes were amended so that now, when a patient cancels their injection appointment the administration team now automatically place the patient back on the waiting list for a second appointment.

Complaint 3

Patient A's family requested a copy of their deceased relative's notes in which they found a blood gas entry relating to Patient B. Patient B's details were roughly scribbled out but still legible and the correct patient details had been written on the result in pen instead.

The family questioned whether this blood gas result was actually that of their relative or that of another patient, causing them to query whether Patient A's treatment had been appropriate.

The circumstances of this complaint were thoroughly investigated, and learning and improvement messages were highlighted across the Trust as a result. These included:

- Staff must always verify the correct patient details before entering these into the blood gas machine.*
- If a patient identity error has been made when inserting patient's details into the blood gas machine then the results must be hand written into the correct patient notes.*
- When updating a patient's notes vigilance is required to ensure no information relating to another identifiable person is included.*
- Staff should remember that they have a legal obligation to safeguard personal information and ensure patient confidentiality.*

Ombudsman Cases

If patients are not fully satisfied with the outcome from the Trust's complaints processes they can choose to subsequently raise their concerns with the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman.



The Ombudsman's office assesses each complaint and decides whether the issues raised warrant further investigation.

The Trust produces action plans to ensure that all recommendations arising from Ombudsman reports are implemented. We also promote and review the sharing of learning from Ombudsman recommendations, in this way we make certain that any service improvements are put in place not only in the area where the complaint originally arose, but also in other areas where there is potential for similar issues to arise.

An example of learning and improvement arising from a complaint that was investigated by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman in 2021/22 is detailed below:

A patient presented at an admissions/maternity assessment unit at six weeks' gestation, based on a home pregnancy test. The team failed to ask about the date of the pregnancy test and recorded her pregnancy as 4 weeks gestation. As a result the woman was not referred for an early pregnancy scan, and the opportunity to diagnose an ectopic pregnancy was missed. The ectopic pregnancy later ruptured.

Further to consideration of the issues raised in this complaint, the following key learning points were identified and communicated to relevant staff:

- Estimated gestational age is primarily derived from the date of the maternal last menstrual period though this can often be inaccurate for a number of reasons.
- Enquiries about the date of a first positive pregnancy test may provide information suggesting a later gestational age than that estimated by first day of last menstrual period. This information may change clinical management both immediately and at onward referral to early problems in pregnancy clinic.
- Asking about date of first positive pregnancy test should form part of routine history taking in early pregnancy problems.

What we will be doing in 2022-23

We want to be sure that complaints we receive continue to be appropriately investigated; responded to in reasonable timeframes and in a manner that reflects the key Trust values; and to make certain that learning from complaints is used to inform potential improvements for the future to help make our services the safest, most effective and compassionate they can be.

Key pieces of work will be taken forward during 2022/23 to achieve these aims including:

- ⇒ Developing and delivering formal training in complaints investigation for Service Area staff across the Trust.
- ⇒ Continuing to support Trustwide implementation of enhanced professional assurance processes, including expanded rollout of a Clinical Record Review process for complaints relating to Quality of Treatment and Care, and Staff attitude and behavior.
- ⇒ Developing and implementing new ways of capturing key messages and learning arising from cases investigated by the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, and from High Risk graded complaints.
- ⇒ Continuing to promote the resolution of complaints on the frontline within wards and departments, and working to reduce the length of time taken to investigate and respond to complainants (particularly where responses have not been issued after 40 working days).

- ⇒ Agreeing and implementing escalation protocols to help address long-outstanding complaints

In addition we will continue to promote collaborative working on a number of levels to progress improvements in our complaints handling processes:

- ⇒ between Directorates & the central Complaints Team, including improvements in the data and information provided by the Complaints Team to staff.
- ⇒ between the Trust and external bodies (e.g. Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, Patient Client Council, Department of Health).
- ⇒ Between the Trust's complaints central complaints department and those in other NHS Trusts

We will also continue work to improve our systems for identifying themes in complaint subjects and promoting actions to address these across the Trust.

The Complaints Team can be contacted at:

Belfast Health and Social Care Trust - Complaints Department

Musgrave Park Hospital

7th Floor McKinney House

Stockman's Lane

Belfast BT9 7JB

Email: complaints@belfasttrust.hscni.net

compliments@belfasttrust.hscni.net