



Our ref: NB/mm

Ask for: Nick Bennett

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John Griffiths AM
Chair, Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee

Via Email Only:
SeneddCommunities@assembly.wales

Dear John

Thank you for your letter of 25 October.

I am pleased to provide the additional information requested by the Committee.

Firstly, you asked about the nature of complaints about GP and dental services. The Annual Report shows that complaints about NHS bodies, received in 2018/19, were 9% higher than in the previous year. Within this, complaints received about GPs were up 22% (to 144) and complaints received about dentists were up 86% (to 41). Complaints were about a variety of issues, including the failure to respond properly and promptly to complaints, and rudeness of reception and clinical staff.

Complaints about GPs included a number about prescriptions (changes of medication, refusal to prescribe the specific drugs requested by patients, repeat prescriptions and prescriptions not being provided quickly). Some complaints related to refusal of, or delays to, home visits. Others were about missed diagnosis and failure to refer patients' to secondary care for further investigation. Several complaints were the result of action taken by GP practices as a result of alleged rudeness or aggression of patients.

Complaints about dentists were generally about the quality of dental work, with a small number about failure to identify more serious health conditions as part of dental checks/work.

Whilst the numbers of complaints about GPs and dentists increased, and a number were subject to full investigation, it is worth pointing out that 13 complaints about GPs were upheld and 1 complaint about a dentist was upheld. In addition, 11 complaints about GPs were settled (mostly as early resolutions) where it was clear that the GP could act to resolve the complaint by apology or further explanation/response. 4 complaints about dentists were settled by early resolution, where the dentist agreed to take specific actions to resolve the complaint.

Many of the complaints I received were not ones that I could investigate, either because they related to events more than a year previously, or because the complaints had not been made to the GP or dentist concerned, or because the principal reason for the complaint was to secure financial compensation.

Secondly you asked about the interaction of my work with the Putting Things Right (PTR) regulations. The new model complaints process will work in parallel with the existing PTR regulations (and the statutory Social Services complaints procedure). As required by section 37 of the Public Services Ombudsman (Wales) Act 2019 the principles of any model complaints-handling procedure which relates to concerns about the NHS will be consistent with the terms of the Putting Things Right regulations. Any draft model complaint handling process for health bodies will be fully consulted upon, in accordance with the Act, before its publication. I would add that the Complaints Standards role should actually reinforce the PTR regulations by backing them with a model complaints-handling process, by working with NHS bodies to ensure that PTR and the model complaints handling process are followed and by providing data on NHS bodies' compliance with PTR processes and timescales.

Finally you asked for more information on Code of Conduct complaints closed after initial consideration. Here is the further breakdown:

	Community Council	Local Authority	Grand Total
Accountability and openness	12	7	19
Disclosure and registration of interests	33	13	46
Duty to uphold the law	13	3	16
Integrity	18	16	34
Objectivity and propriety	3	3	6
Promotion of equality and respect	101	32	133
Selflessness and stewardship		1	1
Grand Total	180	75	255

In view of the Committee's comment on the relevance and value of this information, I will review the Code of Conduct complaint information to be included in my next Annual Report with a view to ensuring that it provides a clear and proportionate summary of my office's work in this area.

I hope this information adequately answers the questions you ask. I would, of course, be happy to provide further information or explanation if it does not.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Bennett', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Nick Bennett
Ombudsman