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HOW YOUR FEEDBACK DRIVES SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Complaints tell us what issues are important to you and what we should look at improving. This is why BFG Health Service (BFGHS) value all comments and complaints about any aspect of healthcare, treatment, quality and availability of services or the actions and behaviour of our staff. We aim to put things right as quickly as possible, and by learning from what has gone wrong we can make sure it does not happen again thus benefiting other service users.

We take complaints very seriously and try to resolve all issues fairly, in a timely manner and without prejudging the outcome. Any information you give us will be treated in strict confidence; and because we do not keep complaints with your healthcare records, they will not affect ongoing or future treatment in any way.

Talking it through

We hope that most problems can be resolved locally and informally. If you have any concern about the care you received, it is best to sort it out straight away by speaking to a member of staff.

- If the complaint you wish to make is about Primary or Community Care you can ask any member of staff to direct you to the person responsible for dealing with complaints.
- If you are an inpatient in a hospital, the best person to speak to is the Hospital Liaison Officer (HLO). The HLOs are fluent in English and German and can help clear up the matter, on your behalf.
- If you are a hospital outpatient, you should speak to the hospital staff. We have arrangements in place for the HLO to be made aware of the complaint and immediate action taken to settle it.

Even when complaints are resolved informally, you can be confident that we ensure lessons are learnt and services improved in future.

Taking it further

If you still have concerns and feel they have not been dealt with adequately, you can make a written complaint. You should address it to the Locality Manager/ Medical Officer in Charge (MOiC) if regarding Primary and Community Care or the Guy's and St Thomas (GSTT) Hospital Operations Manager if regarding Secondary Healthcare.

You may find the following advice helpful if you are making a formal written complaint:

- *Write to us as soon as possible after the event.* This makes it easier for everyone involved to remember what happened, and helps us answer your complaint in a timely manner.
- *Give as much information as you can,* including your name, the name of the nurse or doctor caring for you, and the ward name. This way we can investigate your complaint more effectively. Do not forget to include your telephone number so we can contact you and your address so we can write to you directly.
- If you are raising more than one concern, it helps to *number each of the different points you are making.* This will ensure we understand all of your concerns.

What we have learnt... and acted upon

It is only by listening and learning from your complaint and feedback that we can make improvements to the services we offer. We always carefully investigate all complaints to see if there are any lessons we can learn.

Dr Charles Alessi, Director of Medicine and Clinical Governance of the SSAFA GSTT Care LLP which is responsible for the provision of Primary and Community Care services is very keen for patients to express their views about the services that are provided. He says: "It is only by listening to what patients have to say about the service that we can make changes where these are required. Making a complaint about a service is not necessarily something negative; it can be turned into a positive if something that is not working quite as well as it should is made better as a result of actions taken following a complaint."

An example of a service improvement that took place following a complaint is in the way we now inform both patients and doctors about medicine availability in BFG. When prescriptions are presented to dispensaries for a medicine that we do not stock, we inform the patient that we will source the drug locally from a German supplier. However, on a specific occasion, the drug was not

available from German suppliers and had to be requested from an alternative approved UK source, which resulted in a delay. The ensuing complaint prompted us to make sure we notify both the patient and the GP of any expected delay in the availability of the medicine and of approximately how long. This ensures patients and doctors are fully informed and if necessary consider alternative treatment. Overall, this change has not only improved communication but also patient satisfaction.

Anna Johnstone, is the BFG based Head of Clinical Governance & Assurance (Germany) for Guy's and St Thomas Trust. She recalls a patient complaint following a surgical procedure: "The patient experienced some painful complications after being discharged from hospital and was unsure where or how to seek help. The patient received support from Primary Care but what he really needed was to go back to the Specialist. Although the treatment required was later arranged and the patient fully recovered, it was nevertheless regrettable that he had been discharged without sufficient information on what to do and who to contact should this specific problem arise. The pain and concerns of this patient could have been addressed much sooner if the patient had known how to contact the Specialist immediately." She adds: "GSTT investigated the complaint with the relevant clinical department who agreed that, in future, all post-op British patients will be clearly informed of what to do and who to contact should a complication occur. In many circumstances this will involve going to the Medical Centre but where direct access back to the Specialist is more appropriate, the patient will be made aware of how to do this."

The recently launched 24 hour 'Hospital Hotline' is another example of a service implemented following patient feedback about the lack of support in non-DGPs. In BFG, hospital care is provided through five Designated German Provider (DGP) hospitals where HLOs are on-site to assist with language and cultural difficulties. However, in certain circumstances patients will use non-contracted providers. Anna Johnstone remembers a complaint from a patient who was disappointed with the care provided by a non-contracted rehabilitation centre: "The patient had been very pleased with the care and support provided in a DGP where she had undergone orthopaedic surgery. However, she was then referred to a non-contracted rehabilitation centre where she felt the doctor did not listen to her requests to adjust her treatment programme. She also felt very isolated with many hours by herself during a three week admission. When GSTT reviewed the complaint, we realised the patient had not been informed that there would be no HLO on-site and that the general environment in a non-contracted hospital is less tailored to the needs of a British patient. As a result, we now ensure this is made clear to all patients who are about to be admitted to the non-contracted rehabilitation centre. In addition, we have also set up the 24/7 'Hospital Hotline'. This telephone is manned by HLOs and is designed to help patients in circumstances like this one. The HLO in this example would have been able to assist in the discussions with the doctor regarding the treatment programme."

Tell us when we get it right

Of course, it is just as important for us to know when you feel we have got it right. Your letters of appreciation, compliments and suggestions as well as your complaints will help us make informed decisions about the services we offer and how to provide them.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. The examples given in this article are of real complaints. BFGHS has taken precaution to protect the anonymity of the patients and remove specific details related to their illness and treatment.
2. Guy's and St Thomas Trust are responsible for providing Secondary Healthcare services on behalf of BFGHS. The majority of hospital based care is provided via sub-contracts with Designated German Providers (DGP) hospitals (AKH Viersen, EvKB Gilead in Bielefeld, St Vincenz Krankenhaus in Paderborn, Klinikum Osnabrück and Henriettenstiftung in Hannover). Other care is sometimes provided in non-DGP hospitals where there are no contractual arrangements. GSTT is building working relationships with the most frequented non-contracted hospitals in order to enhance patient care and patient support services in these hospitals.
3. The SSAFA GSTT Care LLP is responsible for the delivery of Primary and Community Care services on behalf of BFGHS. Primary and Community Care refer to health services that play a central role in the local community such as GPs, Primary Care Nurses, Pharmacists, Physiotherapists, Exercise Remedial Instructors, Midwives and Health Visitors, Speech & Language Therapists, Community Psychiatric Nurses, Occupational Therapists, Child Adolescent Mental Health Nurses and Community Children's Nurses.
4. The Patient Support Services Hospital Hotline (the "Hospital Hotline") was launched in November 2009. It is manned 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by a HLO. The HLOs are fluent in English and German and are there to assist with language problems. They are also familiar with procedures and practices within the hospital and can help patients overcome any concerns and make their stay as comfortable as possible. They call the patient each working day to help understand their treatment plans and to try and resolve any other problems. HLOs also obtain consent, from the patient, for the release of information to the medical/dental centre, Unit and as appropriate to the welfare services. This ensures that

translation of discharge documents, follow up appointments at the medical centre or hospital, payment of the hospital bill, NOTICAS and other administrative procedures are initiated quickly by the relevant agencies. The Hospital Hotline number is 0800 588 99 36. Calls made from a mobile phone may be charged.