

## Example PALS complaint

Dear Sir or Madam,

I want to make a formal complaint with the hospital about the care of my mother Mrs. \*\*\*\*  
\*\*\*\*\*, for the period \*\*/\*\*/\*\* to \*\*/\*\*/\*\*. As a family we were appalled by the standard of care. I also understand the mental health team in your A&E department and the social worker will also be escalating the case to their managers.

Mum has severe bipolar disorder and was seen at home on \*\*/\*\*/\*\* by two psychiatrists and another lady, AMHP (who I understand was a social worker). The assessment then was that she required hospitalisation but that no beds were immediately available. We were to await contact about a bed, and they would also look out of area. We waited the weekend, with her mood deteriorating all the time. Finally on the Wednesday evening she was taken to A&E via ambulance on the advice of the mental health team, arriving around 21.00hrs, we believe.

The family were not told of this, despite being reassured we would be kept fully advised of events. It was not until the early hours of the morning that we were phoned about this. We were informed Mum was in the main waiting area, which is not the correct procedure for distressed mental health patients - I do not need to tell you about the dangers of manic patients becoming overstimulated and becoming a risk to themselves and others. She was lonely, frightened and incredibly distressed for hours, without help. We are informed that a fight broke out between two folk in the waiting area, who were shown the door, but this clearly distressed my mum further, whereupon she had also been removed. The caller could not tell me where mum was at this time. Apparently Mum was thrown out by Security and the Police before being assessed by the mental health professionals and threatened with arrest if she came back. Trying to calm me, the caller told me that she'd been on the phone to the police station for an hour to try and find out what happened, only after this did she think to call the family. Unsurprisingly, Mum was very distressed, in the middle of the night, alone, lost, over an hour's walk from her home, in the early hours, her phone had run out of charge, without money, without a coat, and nobody knew her whereabouts. You will not be surprised to hear that by now I was angry and fearful for Mum's safety. This is especially because her mental health means she is very vulnerable and oblivious to who might be a danger to her. We were very worried about the sort of undesirable people she might come across at that time of night in the deprived area of \*\*\*\*\*. Mum's temper can be fragile and we were worried for her safety and what she might do to others. You can imagine our anger, that she was turfed out of the hospital for the very behaviour she had gone there to treat, and was now a missing person (and highly vulnerable) as a result.

To briefly tell you we had to do then, the entire family dispersed around the area in a desperate search in the dark. With her mental state made much worse by her brutal treatment at the hospital, it took three of us and several police to get her back to A & E. This was very distressing and traumatic for all concerned, and of course completely avoidable had she been treated fairly in the first place.

When back in A&E they were laughing and saying "Hi again \*\*\*\*, back already?", which was all very inappropriate considering the danger they had put Mum in. They forbid me to go with her for support due to infection control. We felt that their prior unprofessional and horrible handling of her

case, we were not going to leave her alone without support again. We understand about infection rules but this needed a balance of risks to be assessed. Because we had made these representations, we were able to sit with Mum alone to support her since they could not be trusted to do it. When the psychiatrist eventually came, they said Mum needed sectioning, unsurprisingly as this had been the previous decision and she had only got worse since then.

All the psychiatry team who assessed Mum encouraged us to make a complaint to PALS, because the awful mishandling of a vulnerable patient caused unnecessary danger to her and others. They insisted we stay with her until she was admitted. We have subsequently learned that beds outside the area were never considered, we are told this was due to financial considerations. I cannot think this would have happened for a normal illness like a broken leg – you would be transferred to another orthopaedic department, not told it's too expensive. Mum was assessed as needing sectioning twice and yet still had to wait, only to be treated incorrectly. We have all read in the newspapers about the poor mental health services, but even so what has happened here is unacceptable.

It gets worse, I am afraid. During what I assume was a staff changeover, we witnessed a conversation which was humorously recounting the night's events, mocking us and other patients in a most disrespectful manner. We had closed Mum's door in the hope she could get some sleep, thank goodness she didn't have to listen to this humiliation too. Imagine feeling how we did, scared for Mum, seeing her in distress, exhausted overnight, being dealt with poorly and then having to listen to this undermining behaviour, so loud that we and many others could hear it. I can only describe the behaviour as a disgrace to the hospital and their profession.

The staff concerned are clearly lacking in expertise and require more training on how to deal with psychiatric illness. Mum is a human being and should be treated with as much dignity and care as anyone else. When healthy she is caring and kind. Treating her in an inhumane and undignified way is unfair and unprofessional, against everything a caring profession should represent. To then mock her and throw her out of the hospital like a common criminal is negligent and repulsive. Only when we were there was she treated with any sort of respect and this behaviour is dishonest. It is appalling to think how the system treated her when she was alone. Had we not intervened, who knows what would have happened to her on the streets alone at night?

As a family we have the following points which need answering...

1. Mum is now in a different Trust for treatment. This shows that 'finance' was not the problem in the first place. Why were we told that beds could not be sought in a different Trusts as it was 'not allowed' when it clearly is?
2. Why was mum taken to the hospital without us knowing, when we had been reassured we would be kept informed?
3. - After being turfed out of the department, in distress and with no means of getting home, why did it take so long to tell the family?
4. On arrival, why was Mum whilst distressed and overstimulated, put in the waiting area with the general public, against the Trust policy?
5. How do you explain the staff's attitude and poor handling of the case from beginning to end?

Nothing can undo what has been done to mum and the family, but we are very worried that others may undergo the same treatment. Even worse, they may suffer worse treatment and humiliation if they do not have any relatives to support them, as Mum luckily did.

We, as a family need further information on how we achieve closure for us. In particular we hope staff training will be a result of all this.

Yours sincerely,

The \*\*\*\*\* Family