

Data on Written Complaints in the NHS

2016-17

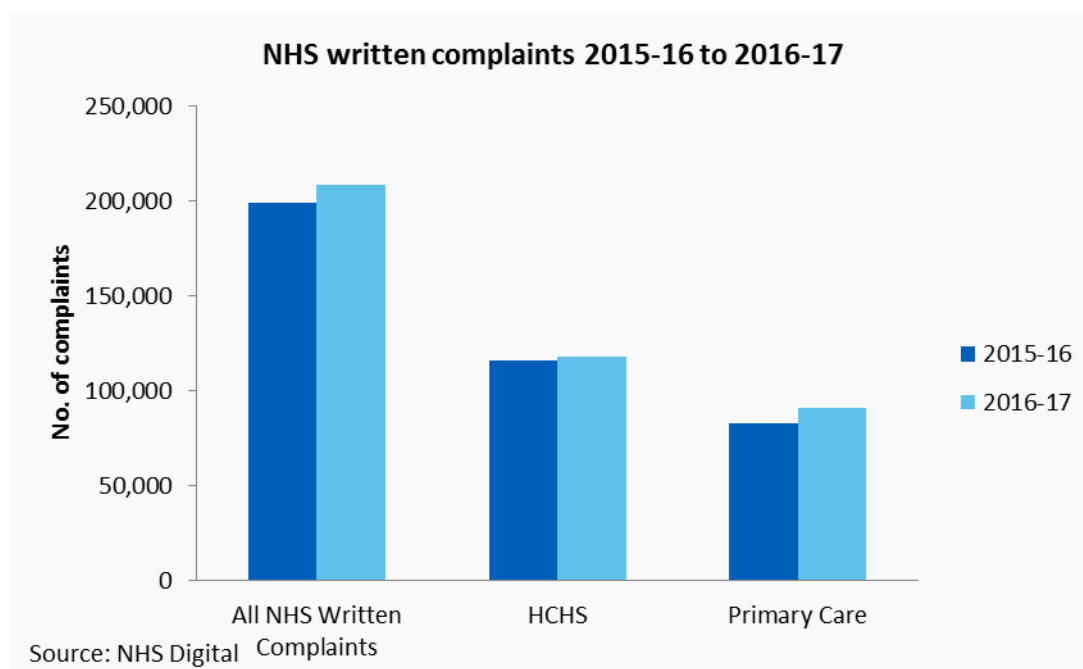
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This publication shows a count of written complaints made by (or on behalf of) patients, received between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017. Data are collected via two parts;

- i) KO41a NHS Hospital and Community Health Service (HCHS) – experimental since 2015-16
- ii) KO41b Primary Care (GP and Dental) – experimental from 2016-17

Key findings

- The total number of all reported written complaints in 2016-17 was 208,415. This is the equivalent to 4,008 written complaints a week or 571 complaints per day.
- The total number of all HCHS written complaints was 117,836 in 2016-17. This is an increase of 1,656 (1.4 per cent) from last year (116,180).
- The total number of all reported Primary Care written complaints has increased by 8,020 (9.7 per cent) from 82,559 in 2015-16 to 90,579 in 2016-17.



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This is a National Statistics publication



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All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

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Note: Due to changes in format KO41a (Hospital & Community Health Service) data from 2015-16 are currently classed as Experimental Statistics. KO41b data (Primary care) is also classed as Experimental Statistics from 2016-17.

Experimental statistics are official statistics which are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage. It is important that users understand that limitations may apply to the interpretation of this data. More details are given in the report.

All official statistics should comply with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics which promotes the production and dissemination of official statistics that inform decision making.

Find out more about the Code of Practice for Official Statistics at www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice

Find out more about Experimental Statistics at https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Guidance-on-Experimental-Statistics_1.0.pdf

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This report may be of interest to members of the public, policy officials and other stakeholders to make local and national comparisons and to monitor the quality and effectiveness of services.

Introduction

This collection is a count of written complaints made by (or on behalf of) patients, received between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2017 in England. Data are collected via two forms, the quarterly KO41a (NHS Hospital and Community Health Service (HCHS)) and the annual KO41b (Primary Care - GP and Dental). The data relates to the complaints arrangements introduced in April 2009.

KO41a: From 2015-16 onwards the KO41a (HCHS) data collection has been revised in both format and frequency (from annual to quarterly). Because of these changes data below an overall total figure are not comparable with earlier years. 2015-16 and 2016-17 HCHS data are classed as 'Experimental Statistics'.

KO41b: From 2016-17 onwards the KO41b data collection has been revised in format following a consultation. Because of the changes the 2016-17 Primary Care data are classed as 'Experimental Statistics' (more information is available within the Data Quality section).

This is the fourth year that KO41b data has been collected from individual practices and return rates for 2016-17 are; 97% for GP and 87% for Dental practices. As these are similar rates to the previous two years we are able to make comparisons back to 2014-15. Differences with return rates for years earlier than this are too great to allow direct comparisons.

571

the average number of written complaints made to the NHS per day

Main Findings

All NHS Written Complaints: (Hospital and Community Health Services and Primary Care)

- The total number of all reported written complaints in 2016-17 was 208,415. This is an increase of 9,676 (4.9%) from last year's 198,739, although only slightly more than the 2014-15 total of 207,407. To put the total numbers of complaints into context for 2016-17, this is the equivalent of 4,008 written complaints a week or 571 per day¹.

Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS)

(2015-16 and 2016-17 are classed as Experimental Statistics)

- The total number of all HCHS written complaints was 117,836 in 2016-17. This is an increase of 1,656 (1.4%) from last year (116,180).

In 2016-17:

- Nearly half (49.5%) of all HCHS complaints are raised by patients compared to 46.0% last year.

¹ The written complaints per day is an average based on 365 days in a year

- Of the 82,408 new written complaints made by or on behalf of patients whose age was known, the largest proportion was for those aged between 26 and 55 years old at 37.2%. Similar to last year's 36.9%.
- There were 146,532 complaints by service area an increase of 12,629 (9.4%) since last year.
 - The largest proportion was attributed to inpatient services with 31.3% (28.9% last year) followed by outpatient services at 22.6% (23.0% last year)
- There were 191,730 complaints by subject area, an increase of 5,098 (2.7%) since last year.
 - Clinical treatment accounted for 51,145 (26.7%) of complaints by subject area, a fall of 8,533 (14.3%) since last year.
 - The largest proportion of complaints received by individual subject area (including the 12 sub-categories for clinical treatment) was attributed to Communications with 14.7% followed by Patient Care including Nutrition / Hydration at 11.4% and then Values and Behaviour at 10.1%.
- There were 161,720 complaints by profession, an increase of 9,476 (6.2%) since last year.
 - The largest proportion was attributed to medical with 41.1% followed by nursing at 22.7% (similar proportions to last year).

Primary Care (GP and Dental)

(2016-17 data are classed as Experimental Statistics)

Because of the changes to the KO41b collection for 2016-17 it is not possible to make comparisons with earlier years below overall totals therefore it is not possible to compare the revised Service and Subject areas. The Professional areas, Complainant Status and Age are new data items for 2016-17.

- The total number of all reported Primary Care written complaints in 2016-17 was 90,579, an increase of 8,020 (9.7%) since last year's 82,559.
- Of the 76,719 new written complaints made by or on behalf of patients whose age was known, the largest proportion was for those aged between 26 and 55 years old at 46.3%.
- The majority (78.4%) of all primary care complaints are raised by patients.
- By service area there were 92,449 complaints with 83.2% of these relating to 'GP surgery' and 14.6% relating to 'Dental surgery'
- By subject area there were 106,226 complaints with 18.2% of these relating to 'Clinical Treatment' and 16.0% relating to 'Communications'

- By staff group there were 94,040 complaints with the largest proportion of 43.1% relating to Practitioners followed by Admin staff with 25.9%.

Further Analysis

All NHS Written Complaints: (Hospital and Community Health Services and Primary Care)

Table 1a: All NHS Written Complaints, 2006-07 to 2016-17, England

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13 ⁽¹⁾	2013-14 ⁽²⁾	2014-15 ⁽²⁾	2015-16 ⁽⁴⁾	2016-17 ⁽⁴⁾	Change 2015-16 to 2016-17	% Change 2015-16 to 2016-17
All NHS written complaints	133,393	131,022	137,736	151,832	149,765	162,129	162,019	174,872	207,407	198,739	208,415	9,676	4.9%
<i>Number of Foundation Trusts not returning data ⁽³⁾</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>		

⁽¹⁾ Comparisons cannot be made between 2012-13 and previous years for figures including FHS (GP data) due to the number of PCTs unable to submit complete returns this year. For more information see the Data Quality section of this publication.

⁽²⁾ Comparisons cannot be made between 2014-15 and previous years for figures including FHS (GP data) due to the change in collection methodology and return rates from GP and Dental practices in 2013-14 and 2014-15. For more information see the Data Quality section of this publication.

⁽³⁾ Up to 2010-11 data from FT was returned on a voluntary basis.

⁽⁴⁾ KO41a (HCHS) data for 2015-16 and 2016-17 and KO41b (Primary Care) data for 2016-17 are classed as Experimental Statistics

Source: NHS Digital

The total number of all reported written complaints in 2016-17 was 208,415.

The NHS England region local offices with the highest overall percentage increases in written complaints were:

Lancashire, which had 5,297 complaints compared with 4,621 the previous year – a 14.6% increase;

The West Midlands, which had 14,439 complaints compared with 12,991 the previous year – an 11.1% increase;

The North Midlands, which had 12,059 complaints compared with 11,084 the previous year – an 8.8% increase; and

Yorkshire and Humber, which had 21,362 complaints compared with 19,664 the previous year – an 8.6% increase.

The total number of complaints fell in:

The South Central region, which had 11,458 complaints compared with 12,215 the previous year - down 6.2%;

The South West region, which had 11,672 complaints compared with 11,888 the previous year - down 1.8%; and

The Cumbria and North East region, which had 9,691 complaints compared with 9,753 the previous year - down 0.6%.

HCHS complaints show a slightly different trend with six regions recording decreases however Primary Care complaints have increased across all regions.

Factors which affect the numbers of written complaints an organisation receives include:

- Processes in place to resolve potential and verbal complaints before they escalate to written complaints. These include some organisations making staff available to discuss and resolve issues.
- Staff making patients aware of other services such as the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), which intends to ensure that the NHS listens to patients, their relatives, carers and friends, and answers questions or resolves concerns as quickly as possible. It provides information about the NHS complaints procedure and how to get independent help if a further complaint is being considered.
- Organisations have a responsibility to highlight the complaints procedures/processes and alternatives to patients through a variety of methods including leaflets, poster adverts and through direct discussions with patients. This better awareness of the written complaints process may lead to more patients complaining.

The large increase between 2008-09 and 2009-10 will be made up partly of fewer non-respondent Foundation Trusts, but will be predominantly due to the complaints regulation changes introduced from April 2009 which made it easier for patients (or their representatives) to make a complaint.

From 2007-08 to 2010-11 it is difficult to state categorically that the HCHS portion of the total complaints has been increasing, decreasing or are stable due to the FTs voluntary response option. Data have not been estimated for non-respondents due to the different services offered by organisations across the NHS.

Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS)

(2015-16 and 2016-17 data are classed as Experimental Statistics)

Table 1b: HCHS Written Complaints, 2006-07 to 2016-17

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16 ⁽²⁾	2016-17 ⁽²⁾	Change 2015-16 to 2016-17	% Change 2015-16 to 2016-17
HCHS Written Complaints	90,801	87,080	89,139	101,077	99,057	107,259	109,316	114,308	120,778	116,180	117,836	1,656	1.4%
<i>Number of foundation Trusts not returning data ⁽¹⁾</i>	<i>8</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>18</i>	<i>23</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>

⁽¹⁾ Up to 2010-11 data from FT returned on a voluntary basis.

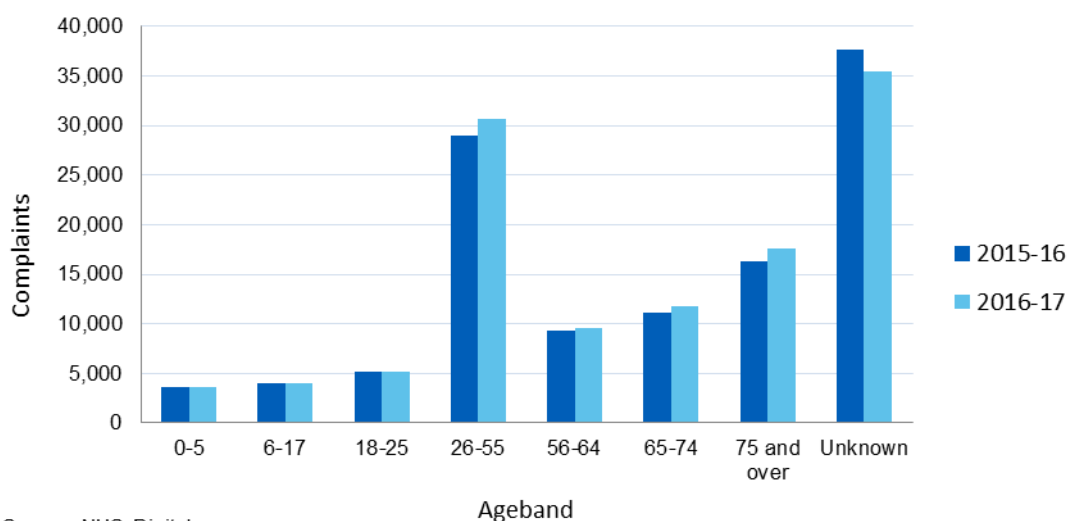
⁽²⁾ KO41a (HCHS) data for 2015-16 and 2016-17 are classed as Experimental Statistics

Source: NHS Digital

The number of reported written complaints about HCHS has increased by 1.4% (1,656) from 116,180 in 2015-16 to 117,836 in 2016-17, however this is still 2.4% (2,942) less than two years ago.

Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) by Ageband

Figure 1: 2015-16 and 2016-17: HCHS Written Complaints by age of patient, England

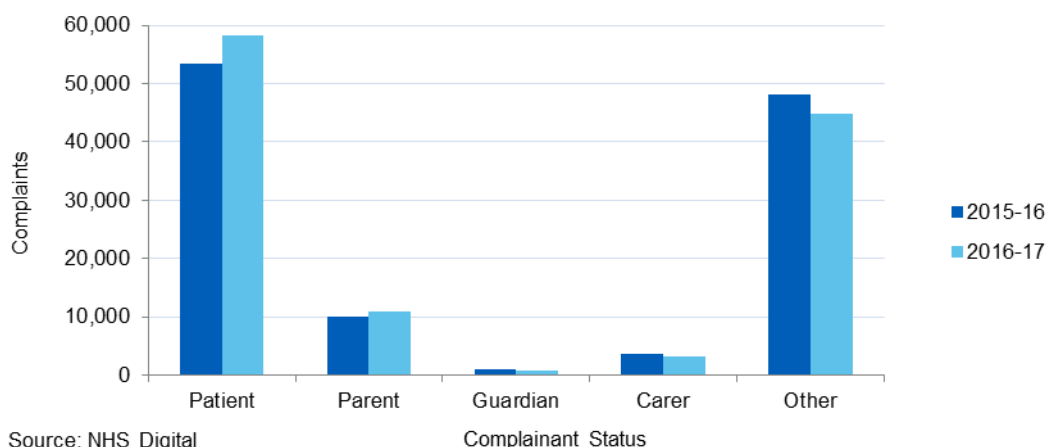


Source: NHS Digital

By patient age, the largest proportion of complaints are for those with unknown age at 30.1% followed by 26 to 55 year olds with 26.0%, although this is the largest age range (spanning 30 years). The next largest proportion of recorded complaints is for the 75 and over group at 14.9%. These are similar proportions to last year.

Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) by Status of Complainant

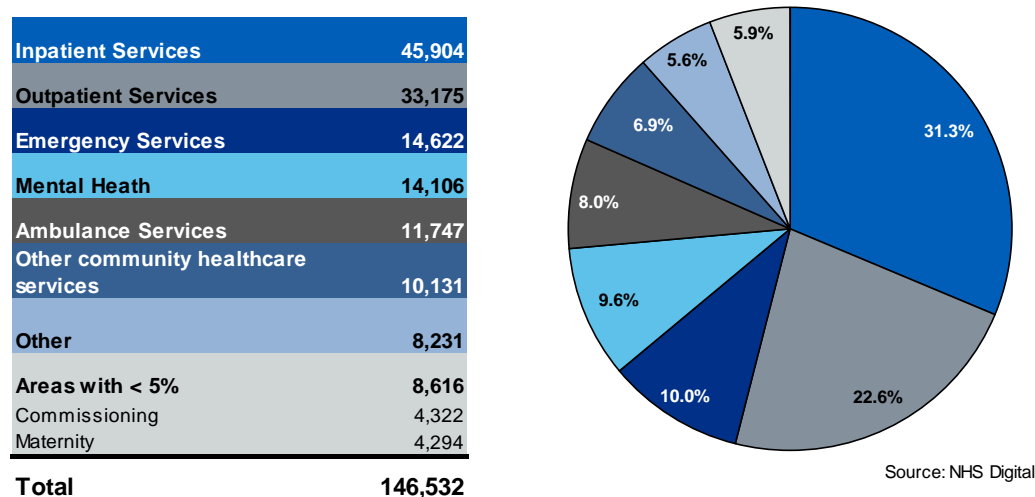
Figure 2: 2015-16 and 2016-17: HCHS Written Complaints by Status of Complainant, England



Within status of complainant the largest proportion of complaints at 49.5% were made by patients, followed by other/unknown with 38.0% and parent at 9.2%. The patient and parent proportions have increased slightly from last years 46.0% and 8.6% respectively whilst the unknown proportion is down slightly from 41.4%.

Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) by Service Area

Figure 3: 2016-17 HCHS Written Complaints by Service Area



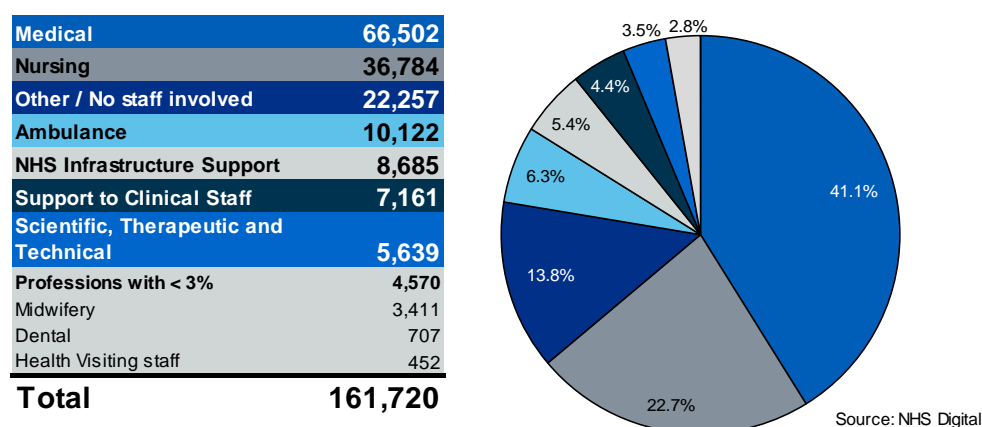
Note: A complaint can cover a range of issues and be recorded under a number of topics within each of the service/subject/professional areas, the totals for which can be greater than the number of new complaints.

Figure 3 shows the number and percentage of HCHS written complaints received by service area in England in 2016-17. Proportions are similar to last year with Inpatient services showing the largest proportion at 31.3% (28.9% last year) followed by Outpatient services with 22.6% (23.0% last year).

By NHS England region local office, Inpatient services ranged from 24.5% (22.2% last year) in London to 40.9% (39.2% last year) in Yorkshire and Humber. As in 2015-16 London is the only region that does not have Inpatient services as the largest proportion of complaints by service area. Instead London's largest proportion relates to Outpatient services with 34.1% (32.3% last year).

Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) by Profession

Figure 4: 2016-17 HCHS Written Complaints by Profession



Note: A complaint can cover a range of issues and be recorded under a number of topics within each of the service/subject/professional areas, the totals for which can be greater than the number of new complaints.

Medical staff accounted for 66,502 (41.1%) of the written complaints made involving a profession. This is an increase of 7.4% compared with 2015-16 when the number totalled 61,899. The medical profession received the greatest number of written complaints.

The nursing profession received 36,784 written complaints (22.7% of all complaints involving a profession), an increase of 9.8% on last year's total of 33,513.

There was a 25.4% increase in complaints involving the Scientific, Therapeutic and Technical profession, which in 2016-17 totalled 5,639 (3.5% of total complaints involving a profession). The total number of complaints involving this profession in 2015-16 was 4,497.

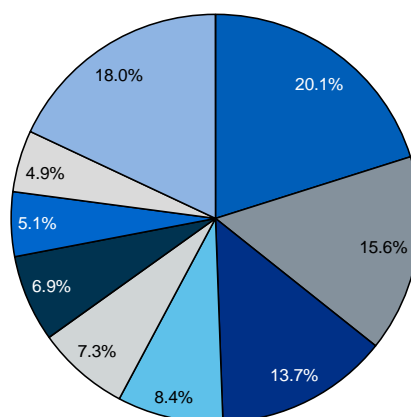
The highest percentage decrease in written complaints by profession was a 7.6% decrease for the Support to Clinical Staff profession, which in 2016-17 totalled 7,161 (4.4% of total complaints involving a profession). The total number of complaints involving this profession in 2015-16 was 7,753.

The Medical profession has the largest proportion of complaints in all NHS England region local offices and ranges from 48.3% in Cumbria and North East to 36.2% in Midlands and East (East), although 'Other' is slightly lower (36.0%).

Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS) by Subject

Figure 5: 2016-17 HCHS Written Complaints by Subject Area - excluding clinical treatment areas

Communications	28,274
Patient Care including Nutrition / Hydration	21,930
Values & Behaviours (Staff)	19,287
Appointments including delays and cancellations	11,767
Other	10,281
Admissions, discharge and transfers	9,665
Access to treatment or drugs	7,189
Transport (Ambulances only)	6,883
Subject (non clinical) <4%	25,309
Total	140,585



Source: NHS Digital

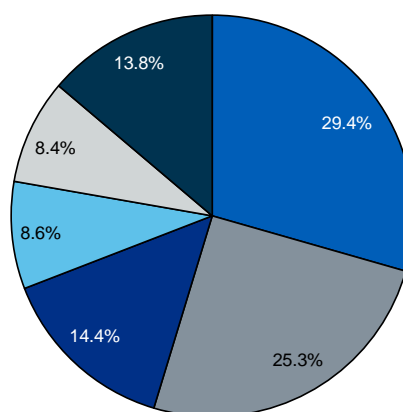
Note: A complaint can cover a range of issues and be recorded under a number of topics within each of the service/subject/professional areas, the totals for which can be greater than the number of new complaints.

By subject area (excluding clinical treatment), the highest percentage of written complaints concerned Communications at 20.1% (28,274). This was followed by 'Patient Care including Nutrition/Hydration' at 15.6% (21,930) and 'Values & Behaviours (staff)' at 13.7% (19,287). These are similar proportions to last year.

In 10 of the 14 NHS England region local offices, Communications accounted for the largest proportion of complaints by non-clinical subject areas. In the remaining four regions, 'Patient Care including Nutrition/Hydration' was the largest proportion.

Figure 6: 2016-17 HCHS Written Complaints by Subject Area - clinical treatment areas

General medicine group	15,053
Surgical group	12,922
Accident & emergency	7,378
Obstetrics & gynaecology	4,414
Psychiatry group	4,317
Subject (clinical) <4%	7,061
Total	51,145



Source: NHS Digital

Note: A complaint can cover a range of issues and be recorded under a number of topics within each of the service/subject/professional areas, the totals for which can be greater than the number of new complaints.

Of those complaints with a clinical subject area the highest proportion related to the 'General medicine group' at 29.4% (15,053). This was followed by the 'Surgical group' at 25.3% (12,922) and 'Accident & emergency' at 14.4% (7,378).

In 7 of the 14 NHS England region local offices, the 'General medicine group' accounted for the largest proportion of complaints with a clinical subject area. In the remaining seven regions the 'Surgical group' had the largest proportion of complaints.

Primary Care: General Practice and Dental

(2016-17 data are classed as Experimental Statistics)

Table 2: Primary Care (GP & Dental): Written Complaints, 2006-07 – 2016-17

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09 ⁽¹⁾	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13 ⁽²⁾⁽⁴⁾	2013-14 ⁽⁵⁾	2014-15 ⁽⁵⁾	2015-16	2016-17 ⁽⁶⁾	Change 2014-15 to 2015-16	% Change 2014-15 to 2015-16
Total General Practice and Dental Complaints	42,592	43,942	48,597	50,755	50,708	54,870	52,703	60,564	86,629	82,559	90,579	8,020	9.7%
Total organisations approached for data	152	152	152	152	151	154	150	25	..	..	..	..	..
of which incomplete returns ⁽³⁾	13	23	36	18	29	36	65	25	..	..	..	..	..

⁽¹⁾ Includes one PCT in 2008-09 which did not submit a return

⁽²⁾ Three PCTs failed to submit a return for 2012-13

⁽³⁾ Information from some PCTs state they did not receive returns for some practices within their area and so have submitted incomplete data.

⁽⁴⁾ Comparisons cannot be made between 2012-13 and previous years due to the number of PCTs unable to submit complete returns in 2012-13. For more information see the Data Quality section of this publication.

⁽⁵⁾ Comparisons with data from 2014-15 onwards cannot be made with earlier years due to the change in collection methodology and return rates from GP and Dental practices in earlier years. For more information see the Data Quality section of this publication.

⁽⁶⁾ 2016-17 KO41b data are classed as Experimental Statistics.

Data as at 1 April - 31 March each year

.. Denotes not applicable

Source: NHS Digital

For the last four years the KO41b Primary Care data has been collected from individual GP and Dental practices and collated by NHS England (GP) and NHS Business Services Authority (Dental). Prior to this it was collected at a Primary Care Trust level.

Return rates for 2016-17 are 97% for GP and 87% for Dental, similar to 2015-16 (92% for GP and 87% for Dental) and 2014-15 (94% for GP and 83% for Dental). Given the relative stability in the response rates and that increases for those practices which provided data in both 2015-16 and 2016-17 are in line with overall increases, then figures are comparable but should be treated with caution. See the [Data Quality](#) section.

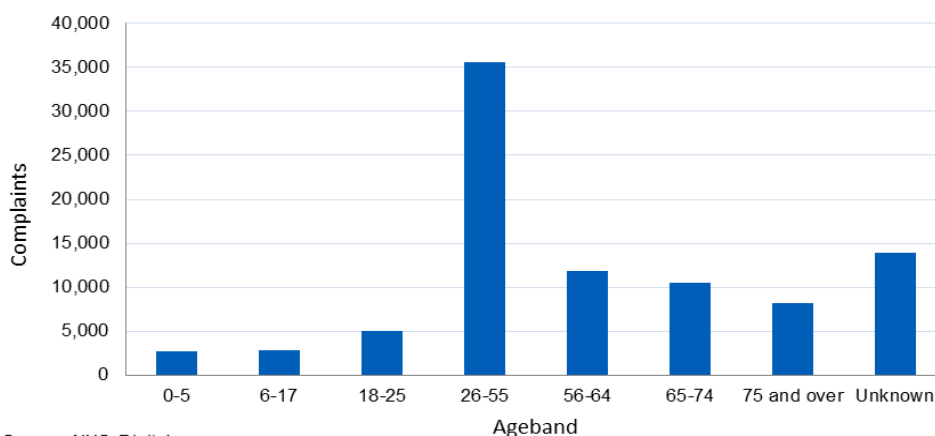
From 2016-17 onwards the KO41b data collection has been revised in format following a consultation. Because of the changes the 2016-17 Primary Care data are classed as 'Experimental Statistics' and detailed breakdowns for each area (service area and subject) are not comparable with previous years. Some data are also new for 2016-17 (e.g. professional area of a complaint and status/age of complainant) in these cases no comparisons with previous years are possible. More information is available within the [Data Quality](#) section.

In 2016-17 the KO41b data return is also split into three parts for complaints recorded by GPs, Dentists and NHS England (which covers both GP and Dental).

The total number of all reported Primary Care written complaints in 2016-17 was 90,579, which is an increase of 8,020 (9.7%) since last year (82,559).

Primary Care complaints by Age Band

Figure 7: 2016-17 Primary Care Complaints by age of patient, England

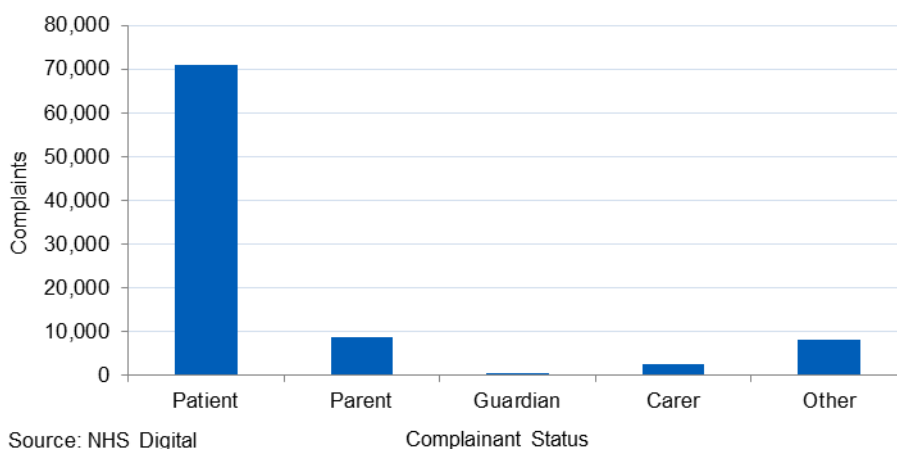


Of the 76,719 new written complaints made by or on behalf of patients whose age was known, the largest proportion was for those aged between 26 and 55 years old at 46.3%.

This occurs across all NHS England region local offices with London recording the highest levels at 49.1% and Wessex the lowest at 31.6%.

Primary Care complaints by Status of Complainant

Figure 8: 2016-17 Primary Care (GP & Dental) Complaints by Status of Complainant, England



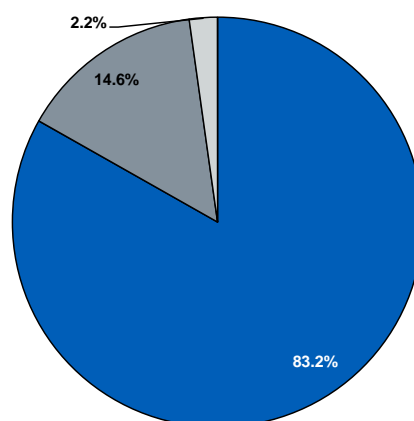
The majority of all primary care complaints were made by patients at 78.4%. Broken down by return type shows 75.8% for GPs, 87.3% for Dentists and 92.0% for complaints made via NHS England – note NHS England figures contain both GP and Dental complaints.

This occurs across all NHS England region local offices with London recording the highest levels at 81.3% and South Central recording the lowest at 76.8%.

Primary Care complaints by Service Area

Figure 9: 2016-17 Primary Care (GP & Dental): Written Complaints by Service Area, England

GP Surgery	76,915
Dental Surgery	13,493
Areas with <= 1.0%	2,041
Other Community Setting	931
Health Centre/Clinic	401
Patient's Home	255
Prison, Detention or similar	230
Residential/Care Home	170
NHS 111	54
Total	92,449



Source: NHS Digital

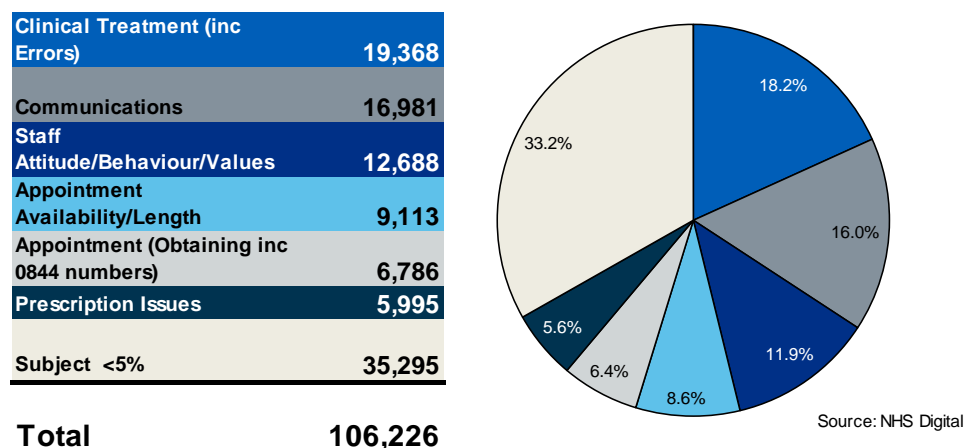
Note: A complaint can cover a range of issues and can be recorded under a number of topics within each of the service/subject/professional areas, the totals for which can be greater than the number of new complaints.

The highest proportion of complaints within the service area related to 'GP surgery' with 83.2%. Complaints made just via NHS England (which can include GP or Dental) show 76.8% for GP surgery and 15.5% for Dental surgery.

It should be noted that although GP or Dental surgery show the greatest number/proportion of all written complaints by service this is where the majority of services offered by GPs and Dentists will be delivered. However, we are unable to present any comparator information, such as numbers of patients treated in GP or dental surgeries, which would add context to these data.

Primary Care complaints by Subject of Complaint

Figure 10: 2016-17 Primary Care (GP & Dental): Written Complaints by Subject Area, England



Note: A complaint can cover a range of issues and be recorded under a number of topics within each of the service/subject/professional areas, the totals for which can be greater than the number of new complaints.

By subject area there were 106,226 complaints with 18.2% of these relating to 'Clinical Treatment', 16.0% relating to 'Communications' and 11.9% about 'Staff Attitude/Behaviour/Values'.

By return type the subject areas with most complaints vary. Of new complaints to:

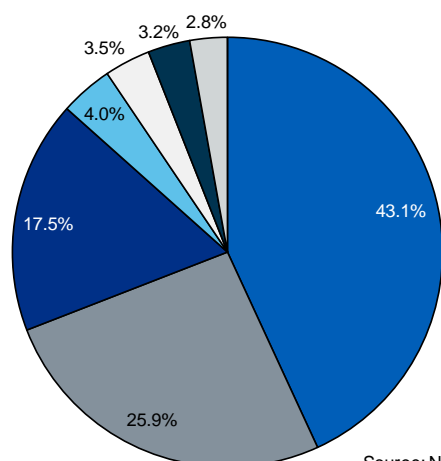
- i. GP practices - most complaints relate to 'Communications' (16.9%), then 'Clinical Treatment' (13.7%) and 'Staff Attitude/Behaviour/Values' (12.6%).
- ii. Dental practices - most relate to 'Clinical Treatment' (38.9%), then 'Communications' (12.1%) and 'Charging/Costs' (11.9%).
- iii. NHS England - most relate to 'Clinical Treatment' (34.2%), followed by 'Communications' (12.3%) and 'Staff Attitude/Behaviour/Values' (9.2%).

'Clinical Treatment', 'Communications' and 'Staff Attitude/Behaviour/Values' account for the highest proportion of complaints by subject across all NHS England region local offices.

Primary Care complaints by Profession

Figure 11: 2016-17 Primary Care (GP & Dental) Complaints by Profession, England

Practitioner	40,565
Admin Staff inc Receptionist	24,400
Other Care Professional	16,482
Practice Nurse	3,729
Locum Practitioner	3,245
Practice Manager	2,977
Professions with < 3%	2,642
Pharmacist	1,051
Healthcare Assistant	1,040
Therapist	538
Podiatrist	13
Total	94,040



Source: NHS Digital

Note: A complaint can cover a range of issues and be recorded under a number of topics within each of the service/subject/professional areas, the totals for which can be greater than the number of new complaints.

Practitioners accounted for the highest percentage of written complaints by profession at 43.1% (40,565), followed by 'Admin staff including Receptionists' at 25.9% (24,400).

This occurs across all NHS England region local offices with Cumbria and North East recording the highest levels of complaints relating to Practitioners (47.5%) and London recording the lowest (39.6%).

Complaints Upheld

From 2011-12 an additional data item, Number of Complaints Upheld, was added to the KO41 data returns, to assess the proportion of complaints that were upheld as it was recognised that simply counting the number of complaints made to an organisation did not indicate how an organisation was performing.

From 2015-16 the KO41a (HCHS) no longer collected upheld data for each service/subject/professional area. The KO41b collection followed suit in 2016-17. Each organisation now records for overall complaints whether it was upheld/partially upheld/not upheld. Therefore comparisons cannot be made with previous year's data below the overall total (see Table 3).

The KO41a data for 2015-16 onwards (and KO41b data from 2016-17 onwards) collects numbers of complaints carried forward/brought forward between collection periods in addition to the numbers of complaints resolved (upheld/partially upheld/not upheld) in the period.

Table 3: NHS Written Complaints, 2016-17, England, complaints upheld/not upheld

	numbers and percentage		
	Total	HCHS	Primary care
Total New	208,415	117,836	90,579
Total Resolved	195,778	112,012	83,766
Number Upheld	71,460	40,081	31,379
Number Partially Upheld	42,690	32,342	10,348
Number Not Upheld	81,628	39,589	42,039
<hr/>			
<i>Total Resolved</i>	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<i>Number Upheld</i>	36.5%	35.8%	37.5%
<i>Number Partially Upheld</i>	21.8%	28.9%	12.4%
<i>Number Not Upheld</i>	41.7%	35.3%	50.2%

Resolved figures may not equal 100% of new complaints due to a number that are unresolved or withdrawn during the period. These are carried forward into the next year.

Source: NHS Digital

Table 3 shows the proportion of complaints that were recorded as resolved broken down by whether they were upheld, partially upheld or not upheld.

During 2016-17 a total of 195,778 complaints were resolved. The remainder are carried forward into the next reporting period. Of these resolved complaints 71,460 (36.5%) were fully upheld, 42,690 (21.8%) were partially upheld and 81,628 (41.7%) were not upheld.

For HCHS only (where comparisons can be made with 2015-16), 35.8% (40,081) were fully upheld in 2016-17, compared with 38.5% (39,817) in the previous year. The proportion of complaints partially upheld increased from 26.4% (27,323) in 2015-16 to 28.9% (32,342) in 2016-17. The proportion of complaints not upheld remained similar between the two years with 35.3% (36,589) in 2016-17 and 35.1% (36,302) in 2015-16.

Comparing Primary Care and HCHS, the proportion of complaints being fully upheld is 37.5% (Primary Care) and 35.8% (HCHS), while the proportion being partially upheld is 12.4% for primary care and 28.9% for HCHS. The not upheld proportion is higher for primary care at 50.2% compared to 35.3% for HCHS.

UK Home Countries

Written complaints data for the other UK home countries are published however these are not directly comparable with the England data within this bulletin. Factors which limit comparability include:

- Wales – New regulations aimed at streamlining the handling of complaints about the NHS in Wales, referred to as [Putting Things Right](#), came into force on 1 April 2011. At present under these arrangements no data are available.
- Scotland – The variation in recording practice across Scotland and some NHS Boards/organisations means these data are not directly comparable with the KO41 data.
- Northern Ireland – have an integrated health and social care system, therefore Trusts figures include complaints regarding social workers. England figures do not include social care complaints.

Related publications from other UK countries are available from the following links;

- Wales complaints bulletin (last updated 2011) : <http://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/?subtopic=Complaints&lang=en>
- Wales complaints online data (last updated 2011): <https://stats.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/NHS-Performance/Complaints>
- Scotland: <http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Quality-Improvement/NHS-Complaints-Statistics/statistics/>
- Northern Ireland: <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/publications/Complaints/>

Data Quality

Accuracy and Comparability:

All NHS organisations with patient responsibilities are invited to complete the complaints data collection (KO41a and KO41b).

KO41a – Hospital & Community Health Service (HCHS) data:

Following a public consultation in 2014 (see the [consultation](#) section) the KO41a collection was revised to include more relevant data items for each of the areas (service/subject and profession) as well as information about the complainant (age/status). The frequency was also altered to quarterly (from annual) and data was collected at a site level within each organisation.

Because of these changes data are classed as Experimental Statistics for 2015-16 and 2016-17 and we are not able to make comparisons prior to this below the overall HCHS totals.

Prior to April 2011 Foundation Trusts (FTs) only supplied data on a voluntary basis (although the majority did supply this information). In the last year (2010-11) of FTs supplying the data voluntarily there were 29 who did not submit data. These FTs were included within the organisational tables as a 'nil' return for that year. Table 1 of the data tables accompanying this publication shows the number of FTs by year who did not supply any information.

KO41b - Primary Care (GP and Dental) data:

What was labelled as Family Health Service (FHS) data in previous reports is now referred to as Primary Care (GP and Dental) as the new label is more in keeping with current terminology.

The KO41b data is made up of three parts:

- i) Complaints made to **GP practices**. This is returned via NHS England – labelled as GP in data tables.
- ii) Complaints made to **Dental practices**. This is returned via NHS Business Services Authority (BSA) – labelled as Dental in data tables
- iii) Complaints made directly to **NHS England** about GP or Dental services – labelled as NHS England in data tables

2016-17 Changes & Comparability

Following a public consultation in 2015 (see the [consultation](#) section) the KO41b collection was revised for 2016-17 to include;

- more relevant data items for each of the service and subject areas
- new information about the professional area, age and status of complainant

- summary data (numbers resolved, brought forward, carried forward) regarding the complaint.

Due to these changes 2016-17 data are classed as Experimental Statistics and are not comparable (below overall totals) with previous years.

Response Rates

From 2013-14 onwards KO41b data was collected from individual GP and Dental practices and more accurate return rates are known (see table below). Because of the lower return rates prior to 2014-15 direct comparisons with these data cannot be made. This applies to all Primary Care data and any overall NHS totals.

Primary Care KO41b Practice Response Rates

	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
GP	77%	94%	92%	97%
Dental	43%	83%	87%	87%

Given the varying KO41b response rates is the data comparable between years?

KO41b data by Return Type and Year - All Responses

	2015-16	2016-17	change	% change
Total	82,559	90,579	8,020	9.7%
GP	67,308	72,668	5,360	8.0%
Dental	10,352	11,867	1,515	14.6%
NHS England	4,899	6,044	1,145	23.4%

KO41b data by Return Type and Year - Practices providing a return in both years

	2015-16	2016-17	change	% change
Total	74,626	80,823	6,197	8.3%
GP	65,069	69,607	4,538	7.0%
Dental	9,557	11,216	1,659	17.4%

Data are broadly comparable since 2014-15 given the relative stability in the response rates for these years and that increases for those practices which provided data in both 2015-16 and 2016-17 are in line with overall increases. Figures are comparable but should be treated with caution.

It is not possible to distinguish if changes from earlier years (up to 2014-15) are due to:

- Simply more complaints being raised (the same organisations responded in those years) or
- Higher return rate due to improved collection methods meaning more organisations supplied data
- Different collection methods used by the organisations responsible for providing the data to NHS Digital; PCTs (up to 2012-13) and NHS England regions (2013-14). Since 2014-15 complaints have been collected from individual practices by NHS England (GP) and NHS BSA (Dental).

Prior to 2013-14, KO41b data was collected from Primary Care Trusts (PCTs). 2012-13 saw considerably more PCTs indicating that a number of practices had not provided a return compared with previous years. In 2012-13 65 of 150 PCTs indicated they were unable to provide complete returns for all practices within their area compared to 36 in 2011-12. It is not possible to quantify how many additional written complaints these organisations received.

The publication denotes these issues with Primary Care complaints by inserting a time series break where appropriate showing that comparisons to previous years cannot be made.

These principles also apply to tables including all NHS Written Complaints.

HCHS data on its own is unaffected so year on year comparisons of overall HCHS totals are possible.

General issues:

Over the past few years the NHS has gone through a series of structural changes. This has affected the numbers of complaints received by organisations as responsibilities are changing over time between commissioning and provider roles. Some organisations have seen large increases or decreases due to changing roles and responsibilities and not necessarily changes to the complaints process.

Organisations have a statutory responsibility to adhere to the 2009 regulations (available [here](#)), which should ensure consistency on collection and reporting of written complaints. NHS Digital has no authority or responsibility to audit organisations to ensure that they are capturing and recording correctly all complaints. Each organisation monitors and audits its own collection process.

Relevance:

The NHS complaints procedure is the statutory mechanism for dealing with complaints about NHS care and treatment. All NHS organisations in England are required to operate the procedure. This survey collects data from all NHS organisations. The data have been published annually since 1997-98.

This annual collection (quarterly for KO41a HCHS from 2015-16) is a count of written complaints made by (or on behalf of) patients, received between 1 April and 31 March. These data relate to the complaints arrangements introduced in April 2009. Although the 2009 regulations apply to complaints about both adult social care and the NHS, these data cover NHS complaints.

These are used by the Department of Health to answer Parliamentary Questions, press queries and are available for use by any NHS organisation or the general public.

The Francis report, which was an Independent Inquiry into Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, made recommendations that included the requirement for NHS organisations to have a more open and transparent complaints process and that complaints information is required to inform patient choice.

Consultations

KO41a HCHS consultation

In 2013-14 NHS Digital ran a consultation on the HCHS complaints (KO41a) element of this publication. The purpose of the consultation was to ask interested parties on the proposed changes to the range, and the frequency of collection of data used to produce the NHS Complaints statistical publication. In particular the consultation covered changes to:

1. Service Area categories;
2. Subject Area categories, including the requirement to report separately each aspect of a complaint where it covers multiple Areas;
3. Professional Area categories;
4. The organisational level at which data is to be supplied;
5. Data collected about the age and status of the complainant and to the outcome of complaints and time taken to reach a resolution;
6. Proposals to use other data sources (e.g. Hospital Episode Statistics and NHS Staffing levels collected through the Electronic Staff Record) in order to place complaints data into a context rather than considering numbers only.

The published response document which detailed the changes to the KO41a collection and publication of the HCHS written complaints from 2015-16 onwards, is available on the [NHS Digital website](#).

KO41b (GP and Dental) consultation

A consultation was carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the Primary Care complaints data to ensure that it is an accurate reflection of the number of complaints made to the NHS, how many are upheld and whether they are user friendly.

The response to this consultation was published on 30 September 2015 and is available [here](#).

Upheld data:

Please note:

- From 2015-16 onwards the KO41a (HCHS) data no longer has an upheld category against each service/subject area. Each organisation now records a single figure for the overall number of upheld/partially upheld/not upheld complaints. Comparisons with earlier year's data below the overall total are not possible.
- The KO41b (Primary Care) collection used to record an upheld category against each area but from 2016-17 it follows the KO41a methodology and only provides an overall set of upheld figures for each organisation. Therefore comparisons with previous year's data below the overall total are not possible.

It should be noted that there is variation in the recording of the resolution status (upheld/partially upheld/not upheld) of complaints across England. Some organisations classify all complaints as upheld upon their receipt while the majority of organisations record a resolution status depending on their investigation of the complaint.

Timeliness and punctuality:

The collection of the annual KO41b complaints information is during May/June following the end of the year in March to enable all the complaints for the previous year (April – March) to be assessed and included in the returns.

The KO41a (HCHS) data are now collected for each quarter (2015-16 onwards) and made available as soon as possible after it has been validated and compiled. Each Quarter 4 report also includes a provisional annual summary for HCHS data.

Accessibility:

All data areas are published and available in this publication via Excel spread sheets and all site level data are in CSV files on the [NHS Digital internet site](#) and [data.gov.uk](#).

Further detailed analyses may be available on request, subject to resource limits and compliance with disclosure control requirements.

Performance cost and respondent burden:

The KO41a and KO41b is a data collection that requires organisations to provide data they already collect. It is extracted from existing administrative systems with minimal burden.

Confidentiality, Transparency and Security:

The standard NHS Digital data security and confidentiality policies have been applied in the production of these statistics.

Users and Uses

How are the statistics used?

i) Known Users of the Statistics

This section contains comments based on responses from users who have found the information in the report useful for the purposes set out.

Department of Health

“The collection of written complaints made by (or on behalf of) patients is used by the Department of Health and providers of NHS funded services to improve services; it also supports academics, researchers, regulators and policy makers in their work. Quantitative complaints data, whilst being acknowledged as a somewhat simplistic measure of organisational performance, are used in part to shape policy in DH.

The information is also used to:

- contribute to speeches and briefings for Ministers and senior officials
- answer PQs and Prime Minister's Questions
- respond to Media Enquiries and other correspondence.”

Press, Journal Articles & Social media

Press – the data in previous reports have been used to underpin articles in newspapers and journals on matters of public interest.

Social media – The NHS Digital corporate Twitter account publicises each statistical report on the morning of release. This complements more traditional media such as press releases (sent to bespoke lists according to specialism), the media section of the website, the publications calendar for journalists and the press office contact programme, which targets key national and specialist media.

ii) Unknown Users of the Statistics

The report is free to access via the NHS Digital website and therefore the majority of users will access the report without being known.

Contact information is contained within the publication to enable users to provide feedback via post, telephone or email on how NHS Digital can make the data more useful.

It is difficult to gather information about the use that is made of the reports published on the NHS Digital website unless informed by the user. However, they could be used by;

- the general public to see where the highest numbers of complaints are made which could aid in the selection of NHS services.
- NHS organisations to compare level of complaints with other NHS organisations

Definitions

A written complaint is one that is made in writing to any member of NHS staff, Trust, NHS England region, or is originally made orally and subsequently recorded in writing.

KO41a: Is completed with information about written complaints regarding hospital and community health services (HCHS) made by, or on behalf of, patients within each quarter within the year (in the period 1 April to 31 March). HCHS organisations are required to complete and submit a return.

KO41b: Is completed with information about written complaints regarding GP and Dental practices (formerly known as family health services) made by, or on behalf of, patients in the period 1 April to 31 March.

Upheld: If a complaint is received which relates to one specific issue, and substantive evidence is found to support the complaint, then the complaint should be recorded as upheld.

Partially upheld: Where a complaint is made about several issues, if one or more of these, (but not all), are upheld then the complaint should be recorded as partially upheld.

Not upheld: Where there is no evidence to support any aspects of a complaint made, the complaint should be recorded as not upheld.

Further Information

KO41a: Guidance and useful information regarding the KO41a collection including validations and FAQs are available at:

<http://content.digital.nhs.uk/datacollections/KO41a>

KO41b: Guidance for the KO41b collection is available at:

<http://content.digital.nhs.uk/datacollections/KO41b>

This bulletin and previous editions of the publication can be found on the [NHS Digital website](#).

To help us ensure that our publications are useful and informative, we welcome comments to inform future reports.

Please contact us with your comments and suggestions, clearly stating 'Data on Written Complaints, England' as the subject heading, via:

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