

**STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL  
00.01 19 October 2010**

## **Health Service Ombudsman's report reveals NHS complaints statistics for London region**

The Health Service Ombudsman, Ann Abraham, has today published the first in an annual series of reports examining NHS complaint handling in England, with information on all NHS bodies in the London region.

*Listening and Learning: the Ombudsman's review of complaint handling by the NHS in England* covers the first full year of the new complaint handling system for the NHS, and includes previously unpublished data about the number of complaints received by the Ombudsman in 2009-10 for every London trust. The report also features patients' stories from the Ombudsman's case files. These include the story of Mrs V who complained to North West London Hospitals NHS Trust about her medical treatment during labour.

In the report, Ms Abraham warns that the NHS is missing a rich source of free and readily available information about patients by failing to listen and learn from complaints. As the report shows, poor complaint handling can make a difficult situation worse for patients and their families. Poorly handled complaints can also escalate, creating unnecessary demands on NHS resources. In the report, Ms Abraham comments that resolving complaints effectively need not be costly:

*'Many of the lessons that can be learnt from complaints are straightforward and cost little or nothing to implement at local level: a commitment to apologising when things go wrong; clear and prompt explanations of what has happened; improved record keeping and better information for patients about how to complain.'*

The report highlights how often the Ombudsman needs to get involved just to ensure the NHS apologises when a mistake has been made.

The report reveals the following key data for the London region:

- 2,727 complaints were received about NHS trusts and primary care practitioners in the London region, equivalent to 36 complaints per 100,000 population.
- 44 complaints were resolved through intervention, without the need for a formal investigation.
- 57 complaints were accepted for investigation, equivalent to 0.75 complaints per 100,000 population.
- 67 per cent (22) of complaints investigated and reported on were upheld or partly upheld.

The Ombudsman uses her report to call for clearer and more consistent reporting of complaint data across the NHS. Ms Abraham says:

*‘Poor quality or inconsistent information about complaints and their outcomes diminishes learning within the NHS and impedes access to choice for patients. The “information revolution” proposed in the Government’s White Paper, Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS, offers a route to redress this ... Clear and consistent complaint information needs to be part of that revolution ... Over the coming years, our data will serve to provide an independent snapshot of NHS performance ... I hope that it proves to be a useful tool for patients, practioners and NHS executives in highlighting how the NHS can continue to improve the service it provides for us all.’*

... Ends

#### Notes to Editors:

1. Ann Abraham holds the post of Health Service Ombudsman for England. She is appointed by the Crown and is completely independent of Government and the NHS. Her role is to provide a service to the public by undertaking independent investigations into complaints that the NHS in England has not acted properly or fairly or has provided a poor service. There is no charge for using the Ombudsman’s services.
2. **Publication details:** Health Service Ombudsman, *Listening and Learning: the Ombudsman’s review of complaint handling by the NHS in England 2009-10*, HC 482, 18 October 2010. The report will be available for general release at [www.ombudsman.org.uk](http://www.ombudsman.org.uk) on 19 October.
3. **Media enquiries:** For media enquiries, please call the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman Press Office on 0300 061 4996 or email [press@ombudsman.org.uk](mailto:press@ombudsman.org.uk).