



What does the
NHS Constitution
mean for me?



Can I
get involved in
decisions about
my care?





*Why do we
need an NHS
Constitution?*

The NHS belongs to all of us

The NHS is there for us from the moment we're born. It takes care of us and of our family members when we need it most.

The NHS Constitution has been created to protect the NHS and make sure it will always do the things it was set up to do when it was established in 1948 – to provide high-quality healthcare that's free and for everyone.

It took almost a year of discussions, research and consultation with staff, patients and the public to produce the ideas which went into the NHS Constitution. This means it is based on ideas from the people who are closest to the NHS.

No government can change the Constitution without consulting everyone who is involved in the NHS including staff, patients and the public. It is a promise that the NHS will always be there for you.

How the NHS Constitution affects you

The NHS Constitution brings together in one place what patients, the public, and staff can expect from the NHS.

It also explains what you can do to support the NHS, help it work effectively and ensure its resources are used responsibly.

One of the most important things the NHS Constitution does is to set out your rights as an NHS patient. These rights cover how you access health services, the quality of care you'll receive, the treatments and programmes available to you, confidentiality, information and your right to complain if things go wrong.



*Will the NHS
Constitution tell
me what to expect
from the NHS?*



*Will I have to be
on a mixed ward
in hospital?*

Did you know:

- If your GP refers you to see a consultant, you can usually choose the hospital you go to. You might want to choose a hospital that has better results for your treatment, or one near friends and family. You can search and compare hospitals at www.nhs.uk/comparehospitals or ask your GP for information.
- You can view your own health records. You don't have to give a reason to see them. Talk to your GP or contact your local Patient Advice and Liaison Service.
- From 1 April 2010, patients have the right to access certain services within maximum waiting times, or to ask the NHS to take all reasonable steps to offer a range of alternative providers if this is not possible.
- You should always be treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with your human rights. This means, for example, that your right to privacy should be respected. If you stay in hospital, you should not have to share sleeping or bathroom facilities with people of the opposite sex, except on the rare occasions where you need very specialised or urgent care.
- You have the right to have any complaint you make about the NHS dealt with efficiently and investigated properly. If you want to complain about an NHS organisation, contact it directly first. If you're not sure where to start, the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can help – see the back page of this leaflet.

PALS can make sure your concerns reach the right people and help you resolve any problems. PALS can help you make a complaint and introduce you to agencies and support groups outside the NHS.

You can read all your rights as an NHS patient by downloading the NHS Constitution at the NHS Choices website
www.nhs.uk/NHSConstitution

The promises the NHS makes to you

The NHS Constitution makes certain pledges which the NHS is committed to achieving. These go above and beyond your legal rights and are a commitment to provide high-quality services. Did you know:

- The NHS commits to provide convenient, easy access to services. Over three-quarters of GP surgeries now offer extended opening hours. Many areas are also establishing GP-led health centres which offer walk-in and bookable GP appointments 8am–8pm, seven days a week.
- The NHS commits to inform you about local and national healthcare services. Visit NHS Choices at www.nhs.uk/choices to find out what services and treatments are available and where.
- The NHS commits to ensure its services are delivered in a clean and safe environment. Tell your GP practice or hospital if you are concerned about its facilities and take part in the regular patient surveys the NHS uses to improve its care.

You can see all the pledges that the NHS makes to patients by downloading the NHS Constitution at the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk/NHSConstitution

There are seven principles which set out how the NHS should act and make decisions. These principles are underpinned by a set of values which were agreed by NHS staff, patients and the public.

The care you receive from the NHS should always measure up to these principles, which are:

- The NHS provides a comprehensive service, available to all.
- Access to NHS services is based on clinical need, not an individual's ability to pay.
- The NHS aspires to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism.
- NHS services must reflect the needs and preferences of patients, their families and their carers.
- The NHS works across organisational boundaries and in partnership with other organisations in the interest of patients, local communities and the wider population.
- The NHS is committed to providing best value for taxpayers' money and the most effective, fair and sustainable use of finite resources.
- The NHS is accountable to the public, communities and patients that it serves.

*"How do I know
I'm getting the best
possible care?"*

What the NHS needs from you in return

The NHS is a valuable resource and we can all help it work effectively and ensure resources are used responsibly. The NHS Constitution explains the ways in which you can do this, including:

- recognising that you can make a significant contribution to your own and your family's health and well-being, and taking personal responsibility for your health where you can
- registering with a GP practice
- following courses of treatment you've agreed to
- always treating NHS staff and other patients with respect
- keeping GP and hospital appointments – or if you have to cancel, doing so in good time
- giving feedback – both positive and negative – about treatment you've received

Where can I find information on getting more involved in my local NHS?

Who can I talk about local services to?

How can I make my voice heard?

How do I make a complaint?

What happens if I don't agree with my doctor?

Can I choose which hospital I have treatment in?

Have your say in your healthcare

The NHS Constitution recognises how important it is for patients to have a voice in their care.

You can have your say in a number of different ways, from choosing which GP you go to, to getting involved in shaping NHS services where you live.

Find out how you can have your say by visiting www.nhs.uk/getinvolved



Where to go next

Patient Advice and Liaison Services (PALS)

The NHS can be a confusing organisation and you may worry about aspects of your care. PALS is here to help when you want someone to talk to about your health needs or any concerns you have about your local health service. Your PALS office can:

- Tell you about local NHS services and help you find relevant information.
- Help to resolve concerns or problems.

- Act for you to get an answer to your complaint or concern.
- Provide information about the NHS complaints procedure.
- Identify problems or gaps in services and help to make changes happen.
- Introduce you to support groups outside the NHS.

To find out about your local PALS, visit **www.nhs.uk/findyourpct**, ask your GP surgery or hospital for details, or you can phone NHS Direct on **0845 4647**.



If you require further copies of this title visit **www.orderline.dh.gov.uk** and quote:
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