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**Former NHS Staff Call for Reform of Patient Complaints**

Too many opportunities for NHS organisations to learn from mistakes are still being missed because of complex and bureaucratic complaints procedures.

That’s the view of retired NHS staff who’ve seen the NHS complaints system in action from both sides.

Their representative body, the NHS Retirement Fellowship, has now added its voice to calls for a new Complaints Charter for the NHS.

Fellowship National Director John Rostill says: “Our members know how much valuable learning can be found in complaints. What frustrates them is that this learning is too often lost in bureaucracy and a defensive culture.”

Members of the Fellowship were among 1,200 patients and carers who took part in a national survey by the Patients Association about the effectiveness of the NHS’s complaints systems. The survey found the system still exposes many patients to a gruelling and unsatisfactory process, despite numerous high level calls for reforms.

It found high levels of dissatisfaction with the complaints process. Patients frequently encountered unhelpful and defensive staff, complicated procedures to negotiate and sometimes dishonest replies.

An accompanying report from the Patients’ Association has called for a Complaints Charter to be adopted by all NHS organisations.

The NHS Retirement Fellowship, a national charity, is the social, leisure, educational and welfare organisation for retired NHS staff and their partners.

Its 17,000 strong membership includes retired staff from all disciplines and all grades across the whole spectrum of NHS careers.

Adds Mr Rostill, a former hospitals chief executive whose own NHS career spanned six decades: “Overall the views expressed reflect those of many of our members, which is that all too often NHS organisations have complaints procedures which are unnecessarily complex and bureaucratic.

“This is something our members have seen both as NHS staff and patients or carers, as well as in a voluntary capacity using their experience of the system to help others navigate it.

“We support the Patient Association’s proposed Complaints Charter because it sets out in a clear and common sense way what anyone making a complaint should be able to expect from a caring organisation.

“They should expect that they will be treated respectfully and with dignity, that their questions will be answered properly and that they will receive an apology if one is required.”

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Notes to Editors

The NHS Retirement Fellowship is a registered charity which is the only national social, leisure, educational and welfare organisation for retired NHS staff and their partners.

It has 17,000 members across England, Scotland and Wales, and 170 branches (postal membership and overseas membership are also available for those who do not have a nearby branch).

Membership is open to retirees and their partners from all NHS settings and disciplines within the Health Service.

The organisation is divided into 15 regions (13 in England, plus Scotland and Wales) Each region has a seat on the National Council, which is led by an elected Chairman.

In addition to subscriptions from members, funding is currently provided from central NHS funds in Scotland and Wales and, following the organisational changes made to the NHS in England by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, from Health Education England.

More information is available from the Fellowship’s website at www.nhsrf.org.uk

The Patients Association is a campaigning charity, listening to patients and speaking up for change. It has been working for over 50 years to make sure that the patient voice is heard and listened to by policy makers.

For more information on the Patients Association visit www.patients-association.com

A copy of the complaints charter is available at http://www.patients-association.com/Portals/0/Complaints%20Charter.pdf