

PROVIDER FEEDBACK: How to File a Formal Complaint

HOW TO FILE A FORMAL COMPLAINT REGARDING A DOCTOR:

- 1) **Complain directly to your doctor regarding the care that you received.** You may do so in person, by letter or by phone. It is highly suggested that complaints be put in writing so that the facts of this situation—as you see them—are spelled out for your doctor.
- 2) **A complaint may be issued with your hospital** as well if that is where the circumstances of your complaint occurred.
- 3) **If you require further action, you may also file a formal complaint.** This is typically done through the state Medical Society or state Licensing Board.

The American Medical Association suggests:

Reporting Ethical Violations:

The AMA and its [Code of Medical Ethics](#) have always maintained that physicians should practice medicine with a compassionate and respectful attitude towards patients, family members, and colleagues. If you wish to report an ethical violation regarding your experience, you must do so locally. The AMA acts as an umbrella organization that offers general guidance to the federation of state medical societies and medical specialty societies. Therefore, reports of ethical violations are more appropriately and more efficiently handled at a local level.

To report an ethical violation there are a number of options that can be considered. First, you may want to approach your physician and explain your concerns, perhaps bringing to his or her attention the relevant ethics opinions from the Code of Medical Ethics. Second, you may choose to report the behavior to another physician or group of physicians who work with your physician. Depending on the nature of the concern, reporting to a health organization or health insurance plan is also an option. A number of these groups have grievance mechanisms in place for patients to lodge complaints. Third, you may register a complaint against your physician through the state medical society or state licensing board. These organizations have appropriate bodies to initiate physician reviews at the local level. If appropriate, the licensing board can take legal action regarding the physician's license to practice medicine.

HOW TO FILE A FORMAL COMPLAINT REGARDING A MIDWIFE:

- 1) **Complain directly to your midwife regarding the care that you received.** You may do so in person, by letter or by phone. It is highly suggested that complaints be put in writing so that the facts of this situation—as you see them—are spelled out for your midwife.
- 2) **A complaint may be issued with your hospital or birth center** as well if that is where the circumstances of your complaint occurred.
- 3) **If you require further action, you may also file a formal complaint.** This is typically done through the midwife's Licensing Board, if applicable.

The North American Registry of Midwives (NARM) Grievance Mechanism:

When a midwife acts beyond Guidelines for Practice, the midwife must be prepared to give evidence of informed choice. The midwife must also be able to document the process that led the midwife to be

able to show that the client was fully informed of the potential negative consequences, as well as the benefits of proceeding outside of practice guidelines.

When a written complaint against a CPM is received by NARM it is referred to NARM's Accountability Committee. The first step in reviewing the complaint is Compliant Review.

If resolution is not reached through Complaint Review and the complainant wishes to take action against the CPM's credential, this must be initiated by a formal letter of complaint with NARM. Formal complaints are referred to NARM's Accountability Committee for due process within the Grievance Mechanism. Based on this review, the Complaint Review group may make constructive recommendations to the midwife regarding areas of study, instances when consultation or assistance is advised, change of practice guidelines, etc. Compliance with these recommendations is voluntary. If resolution is not reached, a formal complaint with NARM initiates the Grievance Mechanism.

Link to the North American Registry of Midwives (NARM) Peer Review for Addressing a Complaint Review (create a PDF File).

<http://www.narm.org/peerreview.htm#Grievance>

Link to the American College of Nurse-Midwives (ACNM) American Midwifery Certification Board (AMCB)—formerly “ACNM Certification Council”—Discipline Policy and Procedures (Create a PDF File).

<http://www.amcbmidwife.org/assets/documents//AMCB%20Discipline%20Policies%20and%20Procedures.pdf>

HOW TO FILE A COMPLAINT REGARDING NURSES

- 1) **A complaint may be issued with the hospital where the circumstances of your complaint with the nurse occurred.**
- 2) **If you require further action, you may also file a formal complaint.** This is typically done through the state Medical Society or state Licensing Board, in the same manner that a complaint is filed against a doctor.

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER OF COMPLAINT

Whether you are unhappy with your doctor, midwife, doula, childbirth educator, nurse or the facility that you've given birth at, you have the right to register your grievance if you feel it is appropriate or warranted.

Before writing your letter, it is best to keep the following points in mind:

1. **Are you clear about what has caused your dissatisfaction?** Was it improper care? An ethical violation? A lack of Informed Consent? The way you were treated? What, *specifically*, went wrong?
2. **What are you hoping will happen with your letter of complaint?** Do you want an apology? An acknowledgement that you were wronged? Are you hoping to change policy? Do you simply wish to be heard? Try to be clear about what your intent is in making the complaint.

Who to complain to:

1. It is always preferable to take your complaint directly to the source. If you are unhappy with your doctor, this is who you need to speak with to resolve your complaint, if possible. Depending on the size and scope of your complaint, this may be the end of your grievance. If necessary, however, you may take action even further.
2. You may contact the relevant supervisory or authority overseer of the person or facility that you are complaining about.

3. You may contact the organization body that has authority over the person or facility that you are complaining about.

Points to remember:

1. Try to keep a record of the events that occurred. If you speak with anyone on the phone to address your complaint, kept track of who you spoke with, the date that you contacted them, what was said during the conversation and what the result of the conversation was. If you write any letters or fill out any complaint forms, keep several copies of what you send out, as well as any replies that you receive.
2. Try to remain calm and courteous whether you are talking on the phone or composing your letter. You will have much more credibility if you are polite and keep your emotions in control.
3. Speak clearly and concisely. Whether you are talking on the phone or writing a letter, try to stay on track and focus on the facts of your particular situation. Articulate the specific instances or details that you are dissatisfied with as well as what resolution you are hoping to achieve.

HOW TO WRITE A LETTER OF PRAISE

While it is important to air your grievance, it is equally important that Consumers recognize and acknowledge excellent care. Just as complaints are designed to motivate change, compliments are hopefully going to reward the recipient for doing things “right”. People love to receive praise and it is important to remember to give credit to those that make our lives better in some way.

Writing a letter of praise is similar to writing a letter of complaint. It is important to be as clear as possible about the points that you would like to convey. More than anything, it is important to be sincere. Forwarding a copy of your letter to the recipient’s supervisor or the management of the facility you were at is a nice touch. You may also offer to be a personal reference as well.

“Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.”

–Leo Buscaglia