



PRESS RELEASE

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The GHA takes note of complaints received in order to inform its new procedures

The GHA has taken full note of the Public Services Ombudsman's Report relating to the calendar year 2017 and is taking all the relevant steps to ensure that the Report's recommendations are being fully implemented.

From January 2018, the handling of complaints has reverted to a system similar to that in place up to the end of 2016, where patient enquiries are first handled by GHA staff with the aim of providing positive outcomes, before formal complaints are filed. Patients can still complain to the Office of the Public Services Ombudsman without seeking resolution from the GHA. These changes to the complaints procedures have been implemented further to the recommendations received from the Office of the Public Services Ombudsman. The process followed during 2017 was one where all complaints were immediately logged as 'formal complaints' and before assistance was offered to rectify any issues. This meant that the number of complaints logged during 2017 did not represent a fair comparison to all previous years.

There has been a 50% reduction in complaints received in January and February 2018, when compared to the same comparable period in 2016. In circumstances where PALS is unable to find a resolution that has satisfied our patients, PALS will register the formal complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman, even if the patient does not do so. This is because the GHA is keen to receive advice on improvements in an open and transparent manner.

The decrease in complaints received this year is attributed to the various reforms in the Primary Care Centre, St Bernard's Hospital and the Community Mental Health Team, as well as the introduction of the 'Patient Advocacy and Liaison Service' (PALS) in November of 2016. Recent reforms introduced at the Primary Care Centre have increased appointment availability and provided service users with better access to General Practitioners and primary care services, such as the treat and see and the issuing of repeat prescriptions

Further, initiatives to better manage bed availability at St Bernard's Hospital saw an emphatic reduction in the number of cancelled medical procedures due to bed shortages. The GHA has had no operation cancellations, due to non-availability of beds, since 9th January 2017. The GHA is extremely proud to reiterate that in 2017 there were only two operations cancelled due to bed shortages. In addition, reforms have seen waiting times for Consultant referrals drop significantly over the last year as have been recently announced in Parliament.ⁱ The average waiting time at the Accident & Emergency Department during 2017, from arrival at A&E and being first seen by a

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clinician, was 1 hour and 27 minutes, which is well within the four hour maximum waiting time set by the NICE guidelines.

The Medical Director Dr Daniel Cassaglia said, “Listening to our service users and taking on board their feedback is an essential part of our strategy to keep improving our services. I want to thank all the GHA staff who have worked so hard in recent months to repatriate services back to the GHA and improve the standard of care we provide.”

Minister for Health, Care and Justice, the Honourable Neil F. Costa, MP commented on the reduction of complaints received. “Reviewing reforms and improving processes in the GHA will always be an ongoing task. The GHA is already a multi-layered and wide entity, which provides numerous medical, surgical and clinical services to our entire community. I am concerned, therefore, to try to ensure that the GHA maintains a bird’s-eye view of patients the moment they enter the system and we still have work to do in this respect. Having said all of this, I am very pleased to have been advised that we are receiving fewer complaints from our service users. This is a testament to the efforts of our medical professionals, clinicians, staff and management at the GHA, who have led and embraced the various reforms. It is vital to us that any complaints that the GHA has been unable to resolve, or which are lodged with the Ombudsman at the outset, are investigated thoroughly and independently to provide the best possible outcome to the complainant. The GHA needs to ensure that, as an organisation, we are open in learning from our mistakes and work transparently on improvements to avoid similar occurrences in future. Whilst there is still a lot to do, I take some comfort in the already evidenced reduction in the number of complaints. I wish to thank the matrons, the clinical staff and PALS and all the various teams involved in ensuring the patients’ journey is as smooth and seamless as possible.”

ⁱ Notice to editors, information on waiting times for Consultants can be found on the Government Website.