



The NHS Constitution: What You Need to Know

The NHS belongs to the people

It is there to improve our health and well-being, supporting us to keep mentally and physically well, to get better when we are ill and, when we cannot fully recover, to stay as well as we can to the end of our lives. It works at the limits of science – bringing the highest levels of human knowledge and skill to save lives and improve health. It touches our lives at times of basic human need, when care and compassion are what matter most.

In January, for the first time, an NHS Constitution was published setting out the values and principles of the NHS. It sets out rights, pledges and responsibilities for patients, the public and staff, giving a clear picture of the standards of care which should be expected. This briefing sets out some of the most relevant principles for anyone commissioning, providing and using National Health Service care. Care providers should be prepared to work more in partnership, making sure patients are aware of their rights and that their actions and decisions support them.

NHS Principles

There are seven principles which guide how all parts of the NHS are expected to behave and make decision. It is important to remember that if you are **providing services commissioned by the NHS** this constitution applies to you too. All seven principles can be viewed at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/NHSConstitution> but perhaps the most pertinent is:

NHS Services must reflect the needs and preferences of patients, their families and their carers. Patients should not be seen as passive recipients of treatment, but as partners whose individual needs and preferences should be taken into account

Staff Responsibilities & Expectations

It may be a while since you undertook NHS training or you may work for an independent organisation providing services to the NHS. You can view all rights, responsibilities and expectations at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/NHSConstitution> but the following are some key expectations for anyone providing services paid for by the NHS:

- *You should aim to view the services you provide from the standpoint of a patient, and involve patients, their families and carers in the services you provide, working with them, their communities and other organisations, and making it clear who is responsible for their care*
- *You should aim to play your part in sustainably improving services by working in partnership with patients, the public and communities*
- *You should aim to be open with patients, their families, carers or representatives, including if anything goes wrong; welcoming and listening to feedback and addressing concerns promptly and in a spirit of co-operation. You should contribute to a climate where the truth can be heard and the reporting of, and learning from, errors is encouraged*

Patient Rights and Responsibilities

The view 'doctor knows best' still perpetuates but it is important that patients, carers and family members are able to ask questions and sometimes question the types of care being offered, after all they know themselves or their loved ones better than anyone. It's also vital that the patients in your care understand their rights. Again some of the key points are set out below but all can be viewed and downloaded at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Healthcare/NHSConstitution> .

- *You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect, in accordance with your human rights*
- *You have the right of access to your own health records. These will always be used to manage your treatment in your best interests*
- *You have the right to make choices about your NHS care and to information to support these choices. The options available to you will develop over time and depend on your individual needs*
- *You have the right to be involved in discussions and decisions about your healthcare, and to be given information to enable you to do this*

The constitution sets out **rights** to which patients, public and staff are entitled, **pledges** which the NHS is committed to achieving together with **responsibilities** which patients, public and staff owe to one another to ensure the NHS operates fairly and effectively. All NHS bodies **and private and third sector providers supplying NHS services** will be required **by law** to take account of this Constitution in their decisions and actions. It is therefore important to know and understand the content of this document and make the constitution work for you and those you are caring for.

This briefing has been produced by the following organisations:

The National Care Forum

The National Care Forum (NCF) represents the interests of the not for profit health and social care providers in the United Kingdom. Website: www.nationalcareforum.org.uk

The National Council for Palliative Care

The National Council for Palliative Care (NCPC) is the umbrella charity for all those who are involved in providing, commissioning and using palliative care and hospice services. NCPC promotes the extension and improvement of palliative and end of life care services for all people with life-threatening and life-limiting conditions in all setting. Website: www.ncpc.org.uk

Voluntary Organisations Disability Group

Voluntary Organisations Disability Group (VODG) is an umbrella group of voluntary sector providers of support services to disabled people. Website: www.vodg.org.uk