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NHS INJURY VICTIMS – COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE IN SPOTLIGHT

New proposals aimed at making it easier for patients injured through medical blunders to make a complaint against the NHS should not be 'rushed through the system', a leading lawyers group has warned.

While the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers (APIL) voiced support for any move to improve the NHS complaints system, it has warned the Department of Health that undue haste could make the situation worse, not better.

"It is imperative that any new scheme aimed at making life easier for patients, is introduced only after careful consideration has been given to any shortcomings and potential problems," said APIL president David Marshall. "We agree with the Department of Health that patients need a system that is more accessible, responsive and independent, but to achieve this, it is vital that its introduction is not rushed through."

Responding to the Department of Health's consultation on the proposals, APIL said it is vital that all NHS staff are given training on how to deal with and receive complaints from patients.

"The Department of Health is proposing that patients can complain to any member of staff and that those complaints can be resolved on the spot," said David. "This is all well and good, but it is imperative that staff have been given sufficient training to deal with such scenarios. Without thorough training to ensure staff know when a complaint is being made, and how to deal with it, such a system won't work."

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APIL has also warned the Department that funding and resources must be in place before any proposals are implemented.

“Financial resources must be available,” said David. “Without proper funding, especially to train staff, then the scheme won’t even be able to get off the ground.”

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Note to editors: APIL is responding to the Department of Health’s consultation paper: Reforming the NHS Complaints Procedure – consultation upon the draft regulations

A copy of APIL’s full response is available at www.apil.com

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