



The Harmed Patient Pathway

**A Guide for Patients, Families and
Carers**

December 2025

The Harmed Patient Pathway: An AvMA Guide for Patients, Families and Carers

When you are harmed because of your medical treatment, it can be difficult to know what should happen next.

AvMA, the UK charity for patient safety and justice, has supported thousands of families who have experienced avoidable harm in healthcare. The founders of the Harmed Patients Alliance (HPA), along with many of their advisors, have personally been harmed by healthcare themselves. They have also listened to many others who have been harmed and who often struggle not only with the physical, emotional, psychological and sometimes financial effects of what happened, but also with how the healthcare provider responded.

AvMA and HPA are campaigning for change in how healthcare organisations respond when harm occurs. They believe this is essential to prevent further damage and to help people recover as much as they can. This requires honesty, compassion, and a willingness from healthcare providers to take responsibility and put things right wherever possible, in the interests of harmed patients, their families, and fairness.

What is the Harmed Patient Pathway?

The Harmed Patient Pathway encourages healthcare providers to commit to supporting the recovery of patients and families after harm has occurred. This includes not only physical harm, but also the emotional distress and damage to trust that can follow.

It asks organisations to recognise that they have a moral duty to care for people who have been harmed, and to respond in a compassionate and fair way. This is important both for the patient's wellbeing and for maintaining public confidence.

The term *care pathway* is used to make it clear that these commitments are crucial for helping harmed patients and families restore their health and wellbeing. The Harmed Patient Pathway is just as important as any clinical care pathway provided for other groups of patients.

How does it work?

The Harmed Patient Pathway sets out **six core commitments** that healthcare organisations should make. These commitments ensure that patients and families are treated with respect, care and dignity after harm, and are supported on their journey from harm to healing.

Each commitment includes several essential elements that may be needed depending on the individual's needs and preferences. The pathway is designed to be flexible and personalised, rather than a "one size fits all" approach.

Key expectations include:

- **Honest, open and respectful communication**

- **Involving patients and families**, if they wish, in understanding what happened and agreeing what needs to happen next
- **Providing emotional, psychological, practical and financial support** where this is needed and appropriate
- **Supporting patients and families** who want to help improve patient safety
- **Respecting people's right to independent advice and advocacy**, and helping them access those services

You can read the full Pathway commitments here: [AvMA - Harmed patient pathway](#)

What would this mean for me?

If your healthcare provider adopts the Harmed Patient Pathway, they should work hard to support you on your journey from harm to healing, and avoid causing any further unnecessary distress.

Some harms can never be undone. This is recognised. The purpose of the pathway is to support your recovery as far as possible, and to help you manage the long-term consequences where harm cannot be reversed. Where possible, your needs should be met in the way you identify.

You should be able to expect your healthcare provider to genuinely try to meet the six commitments and essential elements, based on your own situation. This would be a significant improvement on what many harmed patients have experienced in the past, and should help prevent the “compounded harm” that has too often resulted from poor organisational responses.

For NHS and private providers, adopting the Harmed Patient Pathway helps them live up to their values as caring organisations. It shows a commitment to support those who have been harmed in their care, to learn from mistakes, and to prevent them happening again.

I've already been harmed – what help is available now?

AvMA and the Harmed Patients Alliance are working to promote the Harmed Patient Pathway across the UK by raising awareness among politicians, policymakers, healthcare leaders and the harmed patient community.

While this work is ongoing, AvMA is already available to support people who have been harmed. If you or your family have experienced harm, you can:

- **Tell someone you trust in your care team** - or ask to speak to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service.
- **Ask for information** - you are entitled to request your medical notes.
- **Write down your account** - record what happened and how it has affected you.
- **Seek independent advice from AvMA** - free, confidential advice and support for people affected by medical accidents.
- **Consider emotional support** - don't be afraid to seek counselling or psychological help if you need it.

You are not alone. You deserve fairness, honesty, help, and answers. Please speak to AvMA today on 0345 123 2352 (Mon-Fri 10.00 -15.30) or visit www.avma.org.uk.