



# Independent Mental Health Advocacy

- IMHAs are advocates specially for people subject to the Mental Health Act.
- They are independent of people involved in the patient's care.
- IMHAs can explain to patients how the Mental Health Act applies to them and what it means. They can also explain what their rights are and help them access information about their treatment.
- They can support patients to ensure that their views are heard.
- It is the patient's choice if they are supported by an IMHA. Support from an IMHA is completely free.
- If a patient is so unwell that they can't tell the IMHA what they want, an IMHA can try to help them by making sure that their wishes and rights are respected.
- Certain people can ask an IMHA to come and see patients, including their nearest relative. However it is the patient's choice if they meet the IMHA or not.

## What is independent mental health advocacy?

From 1st April 2009, changes in the law mean that some patients are entitled to help from an Independent Mental Health Advocate. You will sometimes hear these people and the services they provide described as IMHAs for short.

IMHAs are advocates specially for people subject to the Mental Health Act. This means most patients who are detained or "sectioned" under the Act. Patients can also have help from an IMHA if they are on supervised community treatment

or on guardianship, or their treatment is subject to certain special rules.

IMHAs are independent of people involved in the patient's care. They can help patients get information about the how the Mental Health Act applies to them, what it means and what their rights are. They can also help them get information about their treatment. They can help patients understand what they are told by people involved in their care and treatment and help them to talk to these people.

It is the patient's choice if they have help from an IMHA. Having help from an IMHA does not stop a patient from having help from another advocate or from a lawyer. The support of the IMHA service is completely free.

Patients entitled to help from an IMHA can contact the IMHA service themselves to ask for an advocate or ask someone else to contact the service for them. Certain other people can also ask an IMHA to come and see patients but it is the patient's choice if they meet the IMHA or not.

The National Mental Health Development Unit (NMH DU) is the agency charged with supporting the implementation of mental health policy in England by the Department of Health in collaboration with the NHS, Local Authorities and other major stakeholders.