

A Stroke Survivor Speaks Up

One Step at a Time

Ashley Patterson

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a *complaint*? Have you ever had to file a complaint? What happened?

The Shower Is Not Clean

I'm 34 years old. I'm a stroke survivor. I live in a rehabilitation center. Unfortunately, we only take showers once a week. It's a process. I need two CNAs to help me get into the shower chair. They wheel me into the shower, and I get undressed.

You might think I looked forward to taking a shower. But I did not. The shower was not sanitary. I noticed the tiles were rotting. And it smelled like mold and mildew. I didn't want to go in there. I hated the smell. I knew something had to change.

Making a Complaint

I thought it would be good to contact the state to file a *complaint*. But the state asked if I had notified management. They wanted me to do that first before they got involved. They said maybe management would solve the problem without having to get the state involved.

The reason I didn't reach out to management is that I felt scared. I felt like it shouldn't be my responsibility to speak up about the condition of the showers. I didn't want to *ruffle any feathers* here. I don't want to make folks angry with me, and I don't want to get staff in trouble. I have to live here. I am dependent on the staff.

My dad is in a nursing home, and I asked him about how the showers are at his place. He said they were clean. That helped me feel like it is not too much to ask for clean showers.

COMPLAINTS LOG	
Complaint Ref No.	Cumulative No Of Complaints

COMPLAINTS DETAILS	
Name	Email
Phone No.	Address

COMPLAINT	
Mode ☐ Phone ☐ Walk in ☐ Email ☐ Mail ☐ Other	Date Received
Subject	Name Of Investigator
Date Logged	
Action Required	Date Logged
Action Carried Out	Date Logged

They Took Me Seriously

So I decided to email management. Almost right away, someone from operations came to my room and talked to me. He said that everything would be addressed. He took me seriously. It really helped. It made me feel seen.

They addressed it in a timely manner. They fixed the tiles, and they added more ventilation. It doesn't smell moldy now. Now

I'm happy to take a shower there. I told my mom about what I accomplished. She was proud of me.

I Have a Voice

It felt great to take this action. I felt empowered. I know I have a voice. I feel like I need to speak up more in situations like this. For example, my wheelchair needs a new battery, and I am having a hard time getting one. I am not satisfied with how they are responding to me. I will keep working on it. One step at a time.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What does the author mean when she says she didn't want to *ruffle any feathers*?
2. What steps does the author take to address the problem of the shower not being clean?
3. Assume it's you having a similar problem. Compose a letter to management. Share and discuss your letters as a class.
4. Jill Bolte is a stroke survivor. Look up her TED Talk and watch it online.

Ashley Patterson lives in Massachusetts. She hopes that this piece serves as a reminder that we all have a voice, especially people with disabilities.