

**Case:** 201005089, Lothian NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** communication, staff attitude, dignity, confidentiality  
**Outcome:** upheld, action taken by body to remedy, no recommendations

### Summary

Ms C was awaiting reconstructive surgery after treatment for breast cancer. She told us that when she was seen in an out-patients clinic in February 2010 she was led to believe that the waiting time for surgery was about six months. She later found out that the waiting time was actually 13 months. Ms C contacted the waiting list team in October and was given a provisional admission date of January 2011. In November 2010 she contacted the surgeon's office to ask when she should stop taking her medication. Despite several attempts to chase this up she received no response. In December 2010 she tried to confirm her surgery date with the waiting list team and was twice told that they would call her back - this never happened. The surgery was in fact postponed and at the time of Ms C's complaint to SPSO she had been given another provisional date of June 2011. Ms C complained that the administration of and communication about the waiting list was inadequate. Our investigation found that Ms C was verbally given a provisional date for surgery but that no-one explained to her that until this was confirmed in writing she should not make any plans for admission. Nor was she told that even dates confirmed in writing might still be subject to alteration due to emergencies. The Board acknowledged this and also that Ms C was not given a realistic idea of how long she was likely to have to wait. They also acknowledged that staff failed to respond to her telephone calls. They told us they had already taken action to remind staff what to tell patients about the waiting list and about provisional admission dates. Staff had also received advice and education about managing and responding to patient enquiries. We upheld Ms C's complaint, but as the Board had already taken appropriate action, we did not make any recommendations.