

Case: 201101184, A Medical Practice, Lothian NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: communication, staff attitude, dignity, confidentiality
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C raised a number of concerns about the conduct of a nurse at the medical practice she attended during an appointment with her son for the prescription of booster vaccines. She also complained about the practice's handling of her complaint about the nurse.

In our investigation on this complaint, we reviewed all the documentation provided by Mrs C. We also reviewed all the documentation the practice held on the complaint, including a full copy of the complaints file and related correspondence, a copy of the internal complaint handling procedure, policies or procedures covering the conduct of nursing staff at the practice and any relevant medical records relating to the specific complaint.

From the evidence available, it was not possible to conclude whether or not the nurse failed to introduce herself; did not listen to Mrs C or her son during the consultation; or prevented Mrs C from producing her son's vaccination certificate. Although Mrs C stated that the nurse did not provide her with her name, the practice confirmed and Mrs C acknowledged that the nurse was wearing a name badge throughout the consultation.

However, it was clear from both Mrs C's and the practice's reporting of events, and from the nurse's note of the consultation, that the nurse did comment on Mrs C accompanying her son to medical appointments. It was clear that Mrs C personally found this comment unacceptable and unprofessional, whether it was intended to be or not. Given the practice's confirmation that patients have a right to be accompanied, and that it was normal practice to clarify who the accompanying adult was at the start of any consultation, this comment appeared to be contrary to normal practice. We, therefore, upheld this complaint.

The evidence showed that the practice responded to Mrs C's complaint in good time and offered apologies to her on three different occasions. For this reason, we did not uphold this complaint. However, the wording of the practice's apologies could have been more meaningful. By saying that they apologised if Mrs C 'felt' they had done something wrong, they did not fully acknowledge the wrongdoing.

In addition, the practice's complaints handling policy stated that in line with the NHS procedures they would deal with all complaints within 20 working days. For GP practices, the specified timescale in the NHS procedure is ten working days.

Recommendations

We recommended that the practice:

- remind all staff of the need to clarify at the start of any accompanied consultation who the accompanying adult is and that the patient is content for them to participate; and
- review their complaints handling policy to ensure it meets the timescales set out under the NHS complaints handling procedures and includes guidance on how to offer a meaningful apology.