

SPSO decision report

Case: 201102610, Lothian NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: communication, staff attitude, dignity, confidentiality
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained about the care and treatment her father (Mr A) received while in hospital. Mrs C said that her family were asked to contact the ward on the day of Mr A's operation. She said that when they did this, they were made to feel over-anxious. Mrs C complained that after his operation, Mr A had been left alone without access to his buzzer, that staff failed to give Mr A prescribed laxatives, and that staff were generally rude and uncaring. However, Mrs C was mainly concerned that a nurse harshly treated Mr A.

We investigated the complaint and took advice from our nursing adviser. Our investigation found that because of Mrs C's allegation, action was taken under the health board's disciplinary policy and procedure. We also found that there was no evidence in the medical notes that Mrs C's family had been asked to contact the hospital. However, on the balance of probability, we upheld that Mr A had not had access to his buzzer and that staff failed to communicate adequately. We also upheld Mrs C's complaint that Mr A had not been given the laxatives as there was evidence of this in his medical records. We did not uphold the complaint alleging harsh treatment as there were conflicting statements about this, and there was no independent evidence to allow us to reach a decision.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- remind staff to regularly ask patients about the accessibility of their buzzer on the ward and give consideration to completing a ward audit to establish that buzzers are accessible;
- make Mrs C and Mr A a formal apology for their failure in this matter; and
- provide evidence that remedial action has been taken to ensure a similar situation does not reoccur.