

SPSO decision report

Case: 201104041, Tayside NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: communication, staff attitude, dignity, confidentiality
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Ms C's late father (Mr A) was admitted to hospital with circulation problems in his legs. He was diagnosed as having compressed arteries causing reduced blood supply, and emergency surgery was arranged for that afternoon. This was carried out but there was no improvement and his condition deteriorated. Two days later, medical staff concluded that the outlook for Mr A was poor and agreed with his family to provide only palliative care (care to prevent or relieve suffering). Mr A passed away later that day.

Ms C said that the day after Mr A's operation her mother (Mrs A) tried unsuccessfully to discuss his condition with a doctor. Ms C also told staff that she was going on holiday the next day, but said that nobody told her how serious her father's condition was. The next day, Mrs A went to hospital expecting an update and so did not bring any family members with her. Staff there told her that Mr A's condition was terminal. Ms C was informed of this when she arrived at her holiday destination but could not get a flight back until the following day and so did not see her father before he died.

We took advice from one of our medical advisers, and found that while Mr A was critically ill, he was stable on the day after his operation. We found no evidence that his death so soon afterwards could have been predicted, as his condition did not deteriorate significantly until shortly before his death. We also found that staff acted reasonably when they asked Mrs A to come into the hospital quickly and told her of her husband's terminal condition, as at that point Mr A was deteriorating rapidly.