SPSO decision report

Case: **201105350, Highland NHS Board**
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C's wife (Mrs C) was diagnosed with breast cancer in June 2009. In early 2010, she developed problems going to the toilet. Mr C said this became an ongoing problem that caused his wife extreme pain and discomfort. Mrs C's GP referred her to hospital for x-rays of her spine and pelvis which were carried out in July 2010 and showed no significant abnormality. In view of Mrs C's history of breast cancer, the radiologist recommended a bone scan which was performed in August 2010. Although the bone scan findings noted 'increased uptake' (an abnormality) in both sacro-iliac joints (joints in the lower back next to the pelvic region), the opinion was that this could be due to mechanical reasons in the joints, as Mrs C had undergone hip operations 15 years previously.

Mrs C's GP then referred her to a different hospital for further investigation as she was having difficulty walking. An MRI scan (a diagnostic procedure used to provide three-dimensional images of internal body structures) was carried out in September 2010 which identified extensive cancer and Mrs C passed away in April 2011. Mr C complained to the board that he felt that something might have been missed on his wife's x-ray and that she should have been diagnosed earlier, sparing her a lot of pain, and possibly prolonging her life.

After taking advice from two of our medical advisers, including a cancer specialist, we found that reasonable investigations were carried out after Mrs C's GP referred her for further investigation. There was no clear evidence of cancer from the earlier blood tests, x-rays and bone scans. We also found that the description given and findings reached on the x-rays and bone scan were accurate and that only two weeks had passed between the bone scan and the MRI scan being undertaken. We could not, therefore, conclude that there had been a delay in Mrs C being diagnosed.