

Case: 201101414, Lothian NHS Board - University Hospitals Division
Sector: health
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained about aspects of the care and treatment provided to her late mother (Mrs A) in hospital after she fell at home in a sheltered housing complex.

Mrs C said that there was difficulty in receiving accurate information from staff about her mother's condition and whether she was going to be taken to theatre. In addition, Mrs A had gone eight days without food; and the family could not understand how Mrs A could die of pneumonia in hospital two weeks after a simple fall with no injuries.

We took advice from two medical advisers who established that Mrs A was an elderly lady in poor health. On looking at the board's care and treatment of Mrs A, we found that she had a number of pre-existing medical conditions, which meant that she did not have the physical reserves to cope with the complications that followed her fall.

Our advisers confirmed that Mrs A received appropriate care and treatment while in hospital and that it was necessary for her to be fasted in order to manage her condition, and, therefore, we did not uphold this complaint.

We did, however, find that there were failings in the way in which medical staff communicated with the family, and delays in the handling of Mrs C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- remind staff of the importance of communication with relatives about a patient's care and treatment;
- remind staff to respond to complaints in accordance with the guidance contained in the NHS complaints procedure; and
- apologise to Mrs C for the delay in responding to her complaint.