

Case: 201102551, A Dental Practice in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment; diagnosis
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C had root canal treatment from her dentist. She complained that the dentist did not tell her that there was a risk that, if the root canal treatment failed, Mrs C could lose the tooth and ultimately need a crown. Mrs C did lose her tooth and felt that the treatment was unnecessary and that the tooth could have been saved had another form of treatment been given. She also complained that other possible treatment options were not discussed with her and the response to her complaint was unreasonably delayed and contained inaccurate information.

Dentists have a duty to explain any commonly encountered or serious risks and any risks of particular concern to the patient. We found that there was no evidence to show that the dentist had done so in Mrs C's case. Nor was it clear whether the dentist discussed other treatment options (in this case, extraction of the tooth) with Mrs C. We upheld this complaint.

We did not uphold the complaint that root canal treatment was inappropriate. Although the results of such treatment can be uncertain, our dental adviser said that it was the only long term treatment with any possibility of success for the symptoms Mrs C was experiencing.

Finally, we upheld the complaint about the dentist's complaints handling. We found that ten weeks was an unreasonable length of time for Mrs C to wait for a response to her complaint, that she had not been proactively updated on its progress by the dentist and that the letter contained inaccuracies.

Recommendations

We recommended that the practice:

- apologise for unreasonably failing to explain the risks associated with root canal treatment or to discuss other options available with her;

- apologise for the unreasonable time it took to respond to her complaint;
and
- ensure complainants are updated on the progress of their complaint in a timely manner and advised of the date by which they can expect a response.