

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201104151, Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** communication, staff attitude, dignity, confidentiality  
**Outcome:** not upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

When Mr C's mother died in hospital, he made arrangements with a funeral home to have her body collected and prepared for cremation.

Mr C complained that his mother's body was not released by the hospital until late afternoon two days later. He was particularly upset because he had been told that all the necessary paperwork was completed on the afternoon of the day she died. Our investigation confirmed that, although there was a slight delay in the paperwork reaching mortuary staff, this was due to the internal set up of the hospital and could not be avoided. We also found evidence, confirmed by the funeral home, that Mr C's mother's body was actually released the day after she died. Although we appreciated that this was a distressing time for Mr C and his family, we found that there was no unreasonable delay, and did not uphold the complaint.

Mr C also complained that mortuary staff failed to co-operate with the funeral home and that one of them was abusive to a trainee funeral director. The board denied that anyone was abusive or that staff had failed to co-operate, although they confirmed that there was an initial misunderstanding about whether the relevant paperwork was complete. We contacted the funeral home, who confirmed that they did not consider that mortuary staff been abusive or obstructive. They agreed that there was a delay in arranging to collect Mr C's mother's body, but that this was because of the slight delay in the paperwork reaching mortuary staff.

Finally, Mr C complained that he and his family were not given a reasonable and clear explanation as to why there had been delay in releasing his mother's body. The board provided us with copies of the correspondence they had sent to Mr C and details of their investigation into his complaint. The evidence confirmed that Mr C's initial complaint was about a delay in providing the death certificate and other matters concerning his mother's final stay in hospital.

These were all addressed by the board in their relevant response to Mr C. After receiving this letter, Mr C then raised the issue of the delay in releasing his mother's body and the allegations of abusive attitude. The board produced evidence to show that they had also responded to this. We were satisfied that the board provided Mr C with reasonable and clear explanations of all of these concerns.