

SPSO decision report

Case: 201200420, The Golden Jubilee National Hospital
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained that when her husband (Mr C) was airlifted to hospital after a heart attack, there was unreasonable delay in transferring him from the air transport into the hospital and in assessing his condition.

We upheld both Mrs C's complaints. Our investigation found that there was no ambulance available to transfer Mr C into the hospital. The health board and Scottish Ambulance Service were in the process of finalising a protocol under which patients could be transferred on a trolley in such circumstances. However, when Mr C was taken ill the protocol had not been finally agreed or adopted although the equipment required - such as a trolley and protective clothing and equipment - was available.

Our investigation identified that responsibility for a patient remains with the service until the patient is received in hospital. The ambulance staff involved in transporting Mr C were paramedics and provided evidence that they had offered to take clinical responsibility for transferring Mr C on a trolley. However, this offer was declined by a nurse from the hospital who was also there. It was about 40 minutes before an ambulance was available to transfer Mr C. In view of the offer made by the paramedics, we considered that it was unreasonable for Mr C to have had to wait this long.

With regard to the assessment of Mr C's condition, our independent adviser noted that she would not necessarily expect to find notes of an assessment made while a patient was the responsibility of another body. However, although we noted that responsibility remained with the service until Mr C was received at the hospital, the board had in fact indicated in their response that the nurse had assessed Mr C's condition. We found no evidence, however, that any such assessment was made.

Recommendations

We recommended that the hospital:

- apologise for the distress caused by the failings identified; and
- ensure that all staff are aware of the amended policy for manual transfer of patients when ambulances are not available, in order to expedite transfer, assessment and treatment of patients.