

SPSO decision report

Case: 201202627, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: policy/administration
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C, who is a prisoner, complained that the board had refused his requests to see the prison doctor. Mr C had attended the prison's health centre regularly with approximately two to three consultations every month over a six-year period. He made several requests to see a doctor in 2012. However, he received reply slips either asking for more information or advising that his current medication was sufficient and that a consultation with the doctor was not required. Mr C said that because of this his condition had gone undiagnosed and was effectively untreated.

In their response to our enquiries, the board said that requests to see the doctor are through a nurse referral. They said that in Mr C's case, his requests and care were discussed with the doctor. The doctor decided that he did not need to see Mr C and asked that advice was given to him instead.

Our investigation found no evidence in the medical records that Mr C's condition had gone undiagnosed or that the treatment provided to him was inappropriate. However, we noted that although Mr C was eventually given an appointment with a doctor, this was nearly five months after he first asked for one. We found it is reasonable for a nurse to triage (assess) the need for an appointment with the doctor. However, if a patient insists on seeing the doctor and considers that there has been a change in their condition or requirements, it would not be reasonable to repeatedly block access. We took the view that it would be more productive for the doctor to discuss with the patient the most appropriate way to access health care services in the future; why they had been triaged; how the triage system works; and why the doctor was satisfied that the current arrangements were appropriate. We considered that when Mr C continued to request an appointment with the doctor, he should have been given this earlier so that such a discussion could take place.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- make health centre staff aware of our findings on this matter.