

SPSO decision report

Case: 201202678, A Medical Practice in the Forth Valley NHS Board area

Sector: health

Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis

Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained about the length of time that it took to provide a diagnosis for her father (Mr A), who was eventually diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. Mr A initially attended his medical practice complaining of abdominal pain, weight loss and vomiting. He was prescribed medication, blood samples were taken, and he was referred for an endoscopy (a medical procedure where a tube-like instrument is put into the body to look inside). This found a hiatus hernia (where part of the stomach pushes up into the lower chest) and gastritis (inflammation of the lining of the stomach), for which Mr A had already been given medication. The blood tests, however, showed abnormalities, and Mr A's GP remained concerned. She referred Mr A for an ultrasound scan (a scan that uses sound waves to create images of organs and structures inside the body). This came back normal, but the head of Mr A's pancreas was not visible. The GP remained concerned, so she referred Mr A for an urgent CT scan (a special scan using a computer to produce an image of the body) through an urgent suspected upper gastro-intestinal cancer pathway (a route into further treatments not available to GPs directly).

We took independent advice from our medical adviser, which indicated that the steps taken by the GP in reaching a diagnosis were appropriate. The adviser noted that pancreatic cancer is difficult to diagnose. The diagnostic path required several tests, but there was no evidence of any delays within the practice in either making referrals or passing on test results. Our investigation also found no evidence of delays in providing test results.