

SPSO decision report

Case: 201202880, Highland NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: appointments/admissions (delay, cancellation, waiting lists)
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that there was a delay in the board carrying out bariatric (weight-loss) surgery to help control his weight. In August 2009, Mr C's GP referred him to the board's weight management service - a service that was in place between December 2008 and July 2012. The referral paperwork was lost so Mr C's GP sent a further referral in February 2010. The board told Mr C that he would receive a psychological assessment within a couple of months, but the appointment did not take place until a year later. The board did not tell Mr C or his GP that there were no psychological assessment clinics running during this period. In October 2011, the psychologist confirmed that Mr C met the criteria to be further assessed for bariatric surgery and that he would be referred to another board's obesity service, which was the procedure in place at this time. In November 2011, the GP referred Mr C through the appropriate channel but the board failed to advise the GP or Mr C that no referrals to the other board were being accepted, due to the demand on the service. In July 2012 a new national weight management criteria was implemented and in October 2012, Mr C was advised that he was no longer eligible to be referred for surgery because he did not meet new age criteria.

Our investigation found that, had Mr C's referral paperwork in 2009 not been lost, and had there not been a significantly long delay of a year in his psychological assessment going ahead, he would have been assessed under the criteria in place before July 2012. In addition, Mr C appeared to have been misled about the board's weight management service. We concluded that the board should have followed through on their agreement to further assess Mr C's suitability for bariatric surgery.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- consider prioritising Mr C's assessment for surgery under section 3 of the national obesity treatment best practice guide (July 2012); and
- apologise to Mr C for the delay in his psychological pre-assessment being carried out and for the lack of information given to him about his referral to the other board.