

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203180, Fife NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained about her late husband (Mr C)'s care and treatment by the board. She said there was an avoidable delay in the diagnosis of Mr C's cancer and that following chemotherapy in March 2012, it was unreasonable to have scheduled a follow-up CT scan (a special scan using a computer to produce an image of the body) for six months later – Mrs C thought it should have been sooner.

We obtained independent advice on this case from one of our medical advisers, a consultant clinical oncologist (a specialist in treating patients who have cancer). The adviser explained that Mr C had a rare aggressive duodenal (in the first part of the small intestine) cancer which the board promptly diagnosed and treated by surgery and chemotherapy. He said the clinical care and treatment Mr C received was both appropriate and to a high standard.

The adviser said there was no evidence in Mr C's medical notes that the board told Mr and Mrs C when the next CT scan would be carried out. A letter from the board to Mr C's GP said only that Mr C had a further appointment for three months' time. According to the board, they planned to carry out a further scan in September 2012, six months after the completion of chemotherapy. Therefore, while it appeared that the board planned to carry out a further scan at a future date, we were unable, due to the conflicting evidence, to reach a definite conclusion on what the board told Mr and Mrs C about the time frame. However, our adviser explained that CT scans are usually only carried out if a patient has symptoms that suggest the cancer may have come back, and this was not the situation when Mr C was seen in March 2012. Therefore, the board's apparent plan to carry out a further CT scan was, according to the adviser, above standard care and would not, irrespective of the timescale, be deemed unreasonable. We accepted the adviser's view, and did not uphold Mrs C's complaints.