

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201203271, Western Isles NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Outcome:** not upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Mr C attended the hospital's accident and emergency department (A&E) during the night, as he was concerned that he might be experiencing a repeat of a chest condition he had had some years previously. After discussion with a nurse, he was shown to a phone and advised to speak to the person at the other end, who turned out to be from the out-of-hours GP service, NHS 24. NHS 24 advised him to return home, and that they would phone him within an hour to assess his condition. Mr C felt that his situation had not been taken seriously and he left. NHS 24 phoned him three times at home, but Mr C felt too distressed to answer their calls. In the morning, he saw his GP, who diagnosed a chest infection.

We explained to Mr C that it is NHS policy that someone should only attend A&E if they have an emergency and that, if they need to see a GP outside their practice's opening hours, they should phone NHS 24. NHS 24 then assess, by phone, whether the patient needs to see a GP and, if so, whether they should travel to the out-of-hours GP, or whether the out-of-hours GP should visit them at home. The papers we received from the board showed that, when Mr C arrived at A&E, the nurse considered whether he did need emergency care and spoke to a doctor, who decided that this was a matter for NHS 24, rather than A&E.

We did not uphold the complaint because the hospital appropriately established that Mr C needed to contact NHS 24, rather than themselves, then helped him contact them. We also noted that the board said that, because of Mr C's complaint, if someone arrived at A&E but needed to contact NHS 24, staff now made the phone call themselves, giving NHS 24 the relevant details. NHS 24 would then phone the patient back. They believed this would improve their service for patients, and we welcomed the board's use of a complaint as an opportunity for learning and improvement.