

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203738, Lothian NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr A was diagnosed with a syrinx (cyst) in his spine. This is a rare and complex condition known as syringomyelia. Mr A was concerned that a delay of over a year between diagnosis and surgery had lessened his chances of the operation being a success. Ms C, who is an advice worker, complained on his behalf about this and also about his concerns that this caused his condition to worsen, with increased weakness in his legs, bladder weakness, shaking and nerve pain.

After taking independent advice from one of our specialist medical advisers, our investigation found that there are no national guidelines on the management of syringomyelia. Although we considered that, with hindsight, it would have been better had Mr A's initial referral been passed to a neurosurgeon rather than a neurologist, we did not find that the board delayed unreasonably in carrying out surgery. There was evidence to show that after they received a referral for a neurosurgical opinion, they arranged an appointment for Mr A two months later. When it was drawn to the attention of the board that Mr A had not received the appointment letter, arrangements were made within two months to have him assessed and surgery carried out. Our adviser was of the view that even if surgery had been carried out around the time of the initial referral, it was unlikely that it would have affected Mr A's outcome, due to the natural progression of the condition.