

SPSO decision report

Case: 201204744, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: appointments/admissions (delay, cancellation, waiting lists)
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C, who is a prisoner, complained that he was not seen by the prison dental hygienist after being advised that he would be seen again in three months. He was also unhappy that it took nearly four months for him to see the dentist after he reported that a tooth had broken, causing him pain and increasing difficulty in eating and sleeping.

The board told us that when they took over responsibility for providing NHS care for prisons in their area in April 2012, there were no guidelines in place aimed specifically at the treatment of prisoners but this was now underway. They also said that since Mr C complained, the prison had audited its practice against the board's new dental services standard statement.

Although we recognised that the prison's dental resources were going through a transitional period, we were unable to clearly identify why Mr C's hygienist appointment did not go ahead until 11 months after it was recommended he be seen again. We took independent advice from our dental adviser, who said that from the evidence in the dental records it would have been reasonable for Mr C to see the hygienist around every three months. We, therefore, took the view that the delay was likely to have affected the progression of Mr C's gum disease, which the records show got worse during the months he was waiting to be seen. In addition, we found that the time it took before Mr C saw the dentist was unreasonable and not in accordance with the guidance in place at the time, or the draft guidance due to be published. We were concerned that the board did not identify this while investigating his complaint. We found that the delay was likely to have contributed to his tooth decay and the possibility that he may lose a tooth.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- apologise to Mr C for the delay he experienced in being seen by the hygienist and the dentist; and
- provide the Ombudsman with evidence to show that the prison has audited their practice against the board's dental services standard statement.