

SPSO decision report

Case: 201204822, A Medical Practice in the Fife NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr and Mrs C were unhappy with the advice and information that they received from their medical practice. These included that the practice unreasonably gave Mrs C the impression she had breast cancer; failed to advise Mr C to return if his skin condition changed; handled their request for a home visit for their son inappropriately; and failed to communicate their son's death appropriately within the practice.

In our investigation, we reviewed the correspondence that Mr and Mrs C provided and the practice's complaint file. We also obtained independent advice on the appropriate medical records from one of our medical advisers (who is a GP).

In terms of the first two complaints, the adviser said that, where a GP suspects cancer, they should generally frame matters in such a way as to minimise alarm. The adviser noted that Mr C's notes stated 'and review' (indicating that the GP intended Mr C to return). On the third complaint, the adviser noted that Mr and Mrs C's son had a mental health condition, and that the practice made a distinction between physical and mental conditions for house calls. However, this was not considered unreasonable. Finally, the adviser indicated that a medical practice would not generally know that a patient had died until they were told by another source. Depending on the circumstances, this could involve a hospital, the Procurator Fiscal or the police. The adviser said that from the notes, it did not look as though the practice had been told that Mr and Mrs C's son had died.

While we recognised how significant these complaints were for Mr and Mrs C – they had been patients of their practice for over 30 years and had also recently lost their son - the privacy of medical consultations limited the evidence available. In the evidence that we did see, in combination with the advice we received, we found nothing to indicate that the practice had acted unreasonably.