

SPSO decision report

Case: 201300219, A Medical Practice in the Highland NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

An MP (Mr C) complained on behalf of Ms A's family about the treatment Ms A had received from her GP practice. In 2008, Ms A had a mole removed from her scalp. Due to its location, the mole could only be partially removed, but tests found no signs of cancer. In May 2009, she went back to the practice having found a lump behind her ear. Blood tests initially suggested inflammation and possible glandular fever, but when further lumps appeared and did not go away, the practice arranged for a referral to a haematologist (a specialist in blood-related disorders). Tests led to a diagnosis of skin cancer, linked to the scalp mole. Ms A had further surgery on the mole and to remove a number of lumps from her neck in February 2010. Shortly after this, Ms A told the practice that she had a new lump in her back. She asked for a GP home visit but this was declined and instead a review was proposed after a week. She was unhappy with the lack of urgency shown by the practice and transferred to a different practice.

Ms A later developed a breast lump which became malignant. Despite treatment, she died in January 2012. Mr C complained that the first practice did not recognise the severity of Ms A's condition or treat her with the required level of urgency.

After taking independent advice from one of our medical advisers, we were satisfied that there was no evidence of cancer in 2008. There was no cause for the practice to arrange any further investigations at that point, and Ms A was appropriately advised to monitor the mole herself and contact the practice should she have any concerns. When the lumps appeared in her neck, blood tests were arranged and an appropriate referral was made to haematology for a biopsy (tissue sample) to be taken. With regard to the lump in her back, we found the practice's approach to have been reasonable, as Ms A was already under the care of cancer specialists, and had an appointment arranged. We accepted advice that the delay of one week was not significant and noted that this lump was ultimately found not to be cancerous. That said, we recognised that this was a very distressing time for Ms A and took the view that, given her recent medical history, a GP could have visited. Overall, however, we were satisfied that the practice acted in good time and arranged appropriate tests and referrals for Ms A.