

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201301159, A Medical Practice in the Fife NHS Board area  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Outcome:** not upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C said that her husband (Mr C) first attended his medical practice in January 2012 complaining of breathlessness and low mood but that it was not until November 2012 that it was confirmed that he had lung cancer. Mr C died in December 2012 and Mrs C complained that the practice had unreasonably delayed in providing a diagnosis.

To investigate the complaint, we considered all the relevant documentation, including the complaints correspondence and Mr C's medical records, as well as obtaining independent advice from one of our medical advisers. We found that, throughout, the practice had acted reasonably and no areas of delay were identified. Our adviser said that Mr C had an extensive and significant medical history, some of which could have explained the symptoms he was experiencing. He explained that there were many causes for breathlessness and no set guidelines on how to investigate it. He said that, given Mr C's history and the fact that his examinations had been normal, the practice's approach was reasonable. He did note that, on occasion, it appeared that there was a long wait for hospital appointments, but this was not the fault of the practice, who tried to move them forward. The adviser also explained that it was regarded as good practice to approach diagnosis sequentially, particularly when the patient was not deteriorating, and said that the practice could have done little more to obtain an earlier diagnosis for Mr C.