

SPSO decision report

Case: 201301309, 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 it took five months for him to see a dentist. He was dissatisfied with the board's response to his complaint, in that they did not tell him what had gone wrong or what they would do to ensure this did not happen again. After Mr C asked to see the dentist, the healthcare team gave him an acknowledgement slip advising that he would be placed on the waiting list. However, a member of staff lost Mr C's paperwork and he was not listed to see the dentist. When the health care team became aware of the problem, they placed Mr C on the waiting list and he was later seen by the dentist.

We were concerned that during our investigation the board sent us conflicting responses about the guidance they were using as a standard for treating prisoners. This showed that there was confusion for their staff in relation to the standards they applied. We noted, however, that since taking over responsibility for NHS care in prisons, the board aim to have routine patients seen by a dentist within ten weeks. They also apologised to Mr C for the delay in his case, and told us that they would introduce a new appointments system to reduce the likelihood of this happening again.

We were aware that at the time of the complaint the Scottish Government had developed draft guidance for a robust framework for oral health improvement and dental services in Scottish prisons. This says that prisoners will have access to a dentist within ten weeks (the current target timescale). Whilst the board had apologised for the delay, we concluded that it was unreasonable for Mr C to wait 22 weeks to see a dentist and we upheld his complaint. We were satisfied that the board were introducing a new system but considered that they should have explained to Mr C what had gone wrong and the improvements they were making, in order to reassure him.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- apologise to Mr C for failing to inform him that there had been an error in his paperwork being lost and the steps being taken to improve their appointment system;
- highlight to relevant staff that responses to complaints should contain information about what happened and any improvements identified, in line with the Scottish Government's complaint handling guidance; and
- provide a copy of their new guidelines once the Scottish Government's national guidance on oral health and dental services is published.