

SPSO decision report

Case: 201303040, Western Isles NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: other
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mrs C, who lives on one of the Scottish islands, complained that the board failed to repay her full transport and accommodation costs when she escorted her mother to a mainland hospital for in-patient treatment. Mrs C had intended to stay for four nights, then take her mother home but, as her mother was not well enough to leave hospital on the expected date, Mrs C had to return home alone. She was unhappy that, in these circumstances, the board had not paid her full costs.

The board's patient transport policy says that they can only reimburse costs associated with escorting a patient to and from hospital. Mrs C had chosen to stay over, and the board explained that as her mother was not discharged when expected, there was only one approved journey for which an escort was required. They also explained that they can only reimburse accommodation costs when the escort stays and escorts the patient home (provided that the total cost of the stay does not exceed the cost of a second return fare to collect the patient). If the patient is not discharged when expected, accommodation costs cannot be reimbursed, but the board will pay for a second return journey to escort the patient home. We also found that the guidance says that authorised escorts are expected to return home at the earliest opportunity or to stay at their own expense. We noted that the patient travel team had advised Mrs C of the available options before the outward journey. On her return they had said that they would be happy to book a second flight for her to collect her mother, or alternatively if she organised her own flight for this, they would pay her overnight accommodation claim.

We did not uphold the complaint as we found that the board had acted in accordance with their procedures. We noted that although they were of the view that they had provided accurate information before Mrs C travelled, the board had also asked the patient travel team to review the guidance issued to patients and GPs, to ensure that it is as clear as possible for the future.