

SPSO decision report

Case: 201305578, Grampian NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained to us about the care and treatment her late father (Mr A) received at Aberdeen Royal Infirmary before his death from a urological cancer (relating to the urinary system and male reproductive system) that had spread through his body. Mrs C said that the urology care and treatment the board had provided to her father over a number of years had been inadequate. We took independent advice on this aspect of Mrs C's complaint from a number of medical advisers who are specialists in various relevant fields. We found that, although communication with Mr A and his family could have been better, there had been no major failings in relation to the urology service's care and treatment of Mr A. We did not uphold this complaint.

Mrs C also complained about the care and treatment the board had provided to her father over a number of years for his abdominal symptoms. We upheld this complaint, as we found that there had been a delay in carrying out a colonoscopy (examination of the bowel with a camera on a flexible tube) or alternative investigations. Although this led to a four-month delay in diagnosing Mr A's rectal tumour, there was no impact on the overall outcome, as the tumour was benign (non-cancerous). Mr A's urological cancer had already spread to other parts of his body by that time.

Mrs C also complained that the board had provided inadequate care and treatment to her father in the last few weeks of his life. Although we found that the care Mr A had received in relation to his visual problems had not been adequate, we found that the end of life care provided to him had been reasonable overall. We did not uphold this aspect of the complaint.

Finally, Mrs C complained about the board's handling of her complaint. We found that the board's former medical director should have ensured that Mrs C's correspondence to him was dealt with as a complaint rather than trying to deal with the matter personally. We also found that comments the former medical director had made to Mrs C in an email had been inappropriate, and that it had also been inappropriate to send Mrs C a gift voucher. In view of this, we upheld this aspect of Mrs C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- issue a written apology to Mrs C for the failings we identified;
- take steps to make the surgical staff responsible for the delay in the colonoscopy or alternative investigations being carried out aware of our decision on this matter and consider if the matter should be discussed at their annual appraisal;
- make the staff in the gastroenterology team aware of our comments on communication with Mrs C and Mr A;
- provide us with evidence that steps have been taken to improve the care delivered to patients with visual impairments since Mr A was in hospital; and
- provide evidence to us that the recommendations made in relation to their investigation into the former

medical director's actions have been implemented.