

SPSO decision report

Case: 201400370, Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr and Mrs C complained to the board about how a bone marrow sampling procedure was carried out on Mrs C. Some weeks after making the complaint Mrs C died. Mr C felt the board's response to their complaint was inadequate, and so he complained to us.

We looked at information from Mr C and from the board. We found that Mr and Mrs C did not make a written complaint to the board, but spoke to a member of staff who made a note of the complaint. The board investigated it, and wrote to Mrs C. Their letter to Mrs C mainly contained apologies rather than explanations, particularly apologising that staff did not acknowledge sooner the level of pain and discomfort she experienced during the procedure.

As there was no written complaint, we could not say with certainty exactly what answers Mr and Mrs C told the board they wanted about the procedure. We found, however, that much of the detail the board gave us when we contacted them was considered during their investigation of the complaint, but was not in their letter. Given this, we decided it would have been reasonable for the board to have included some of this in their letter, to reassure Mrs C that the procedure was carried out in line with normal standards. Their letter did not achieve an appropriate balance between apology and explanation. We upheld Mr C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- ensure notes made by staff of verbal complaints contain sufficient detail on the specific points of complaint to enable the board to respond to those points in their letters; and
- consider how the evidence gathered during the investigation of Mr and Mrs C's complaint could have, empathetically, been included in the board's response letter to Mrs C.