

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201401599, A Dentist in the Highland NHS Board area  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C complained to us about the care and treatment he had received from a dentist. He had attended the dentist for emergency treatment, who had extracted a badly broken tooth. Mr C was given an antibiotic and advised to return to the surgery for a more detailed examination to be carried out to assess what other dental treatment was required.

Mr C returned to the dentist two days later and complained of pain and swelling. He said that he had been unable to eat. It was noted that a small swelling was present at the border of the lower jaw and there was pus discharging from the area where the tooth had been extracted. The dentist diagnosed a dry socket (an infected wound at the site of an extraction) and Mr C was prescribed another antibiotic and an antiseptic mouthwash. A dressing was not applied, as this was too uncomfortable for him.

Mr C attended his GP on the following day, as he was still in some pain. He was then admitted to hospital later that day with a submandibular (inside the lower jaw) abscess, which was spreading into the tissue spaces. This was leading to extensive swelling, which was threatening his breathing. He was also suffering from a fever. Mr C was admitted in order that the hospital could drain the infected fluid from the abscess.

There was nothing to indicate the presence of the abscess when Mr C had the tooth extracted on his first visit to the dentist. However, when Mr C attended again two days later, the dentist noted unusual symptoms, including a spreading infection, that did not fit the normal pattern. The development of an abscess of the type Mr C experienced following dental extraction is a very rare occurrence. After taking independent advice from our dental adviser, we found that the dentist should have arranged an urgent referral to the local maxillofacial surgery department (the specialty concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the mouth, jaws, face and neck) when Mr C had returned complaining of pain and swelling, but had failed to do so. In view of this, we found that the dentist did not provide reasonable care and treatment on that occasion and upheld the complaint.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the dentist:

- issue a written apology to Mr C for the failings identified.