

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201401639, Lothian NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** communication / staff attitude / dignity / confidentiality  
**Outcome:** not upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Ms C attended the A&E department at St John's Hospital with a skin problem behind her ear. She thought it had been caused by a reaction to hair dye. She complained that the triage nurse (who decides which patients should be treated first based on how sick or seriously injured they are) wrongly categorised her condition as minor, which meant she would have to wait a long time to see a doctor. She also complained that the nurse gave the impression she was wasting the nurse's time and, when Ms C decided to leave before seeing a doctor, she said the nurse asked her to sign a form, which Ms C did not realise until later was a form to declare that she was discharging herself from the hospital.

We were unable to establish the facts about what the nurse said, or how she said it. However, we concluded that the nurse had acted within triage guidelines in categorising Ms C's condition as minor, which meant she was likely to have to wait some time, while patients with higher priority categories were seen by a doctor. We also concluded that the self-discharge form was easy to read and understand and that Ms C could reasonably have been expected to know that she was signing it to indicate that she was leaving the hospital against advice. If she had not understood the form, she could have asked what it was before signing. We did not uphold the complaint.