

SPSO decision report

Case: 201401735, A Medical Practice in the Grampian NHS Board area

Sector: health

Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis

Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Ms C, an advice worker, complained on behalf of her client (Mrs A) that the care and treatment provided by her medical practice between June and August 2011 was unreasonable.

Mrs A had a history of abdominal and gynaecological (relating to the female reproductive system) problems and some stress-related illness. She saw three different GPs in June, July and August 2011 for recurrent symptoms of bloating and stomach pain. Some investigations were undertaken but no conclusive results were obtained. Mrs A was seen again by one of the GPs in November 2011 and was referred on a routine basis for a colonoscopy (examination of the intestines by a camera). Further investigations were undertaken in February 2012 and Mrs A was diagnosed with ovarian (part of the female reproductive system) cancer later that month. She has since undergone treatment that was ongoing at the time she complained to us.

Our investigation included taking independent medical advice from one of our GP advisers. They considered that in view of the symptoms reported by Mrs A, the 'watchful waiting' approach taken by the GPs between June and August 2011 was reasonable and in line with national guidance in place at the time. However, our adviser considered that, in view of the duration of Mrs A's symptoms by the time she was seen in November 2011, the referral made at that time should have been made on an urgent basis. This would have indicated a suspicion of cancer, which would have meant that she would have been seen within two weeks of the referral. The adviser did not, however, consider that the resultant six-week delay had an effect on the overall outcome or treatment for Mrs A. The complaint was not upheld but the findings were drawn to the attention of the GPs involved.