

SPSO decision report

Case: 201402018, Tayside NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C had a shunt (a thin tube that drains fluid from the brain to another part of the body) in place in order to relieve his severe headaches. He complained to us that when he was having this replaced at Ninewells Hospital, he contracted an infection. Mr C was readmitted to the hospital several days after the operation, with a severe abdominal infection. It was thought that the infection came from the new shunt and this was subsequently removed. Mr C said that he had been unable to return to work after contracting the infection.

After obtaining independent medical advice from a consultant neurosurgeon, we found that it had been reasonable to carry out the operation. It was difficult to be sure about the origin and type of infection that Mr C experienced, but our adviser thought it likely that bacteria from the skin had transferred to the shunt during the surgery. There is always a risk of infection in these types of operations, and we found that this risk was included in the consent form Mr C signed before the operation. The surgical team had prepared Mr C's skin correctly before the operation and had given him an antibiotic to try to prevent infection, in line with the relevant guidelines.

As we found no evidence of any failings by the surgical team and there was nothing they could have done differently to prevent the infection, we did not uphold the complaint.