

SPSO decision report

Case: 201405761, A Medical Practice in the Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained about the delay in diagnosing her late husband (Mr C)'s cancer. Mr C suffered intermittent left-sided pain after a fall and attended the practice on numerous occasions over the next two years. Although Mr C had a number of tests and investigations, he was not diagnosed with cancer until a scan over two years after the fall.

The practice apologised that it took so long to diagnose Mr C's cancer, but explained that his case was a challenging one and diagnosis was difficult. They said Mr C did not have symptoms suggesting a serious underlying problem until about two years after his fall, and also did not start losing weight until after this. While they immediately referred Mr C to the colorectal service (specialising in the colon and rectum), it took three specialist referrals (two to the colorectal service and one to the gastroenterology clinic (specialising in the digestive system) before Mr C's cancer was diagnosed about five months later.

After taking independent medical advice, we did not uphold Mrs C's complaint. We found that Mr C's symptoms did not suggest a serious underlying problem until about two years after his fall. We found the practice then acted appropriately and timeously in referring Mr C to specialists for investigations. Our adviser explained that Mr C's symptoms first suggested an underlying colorectal problem, and it was appropriate to refer Mr C for colorectal investigations and a colorectal clinic review. However, when nothing was found but Mr C's problems persisted and he experienced ongoing weight loss, the practice acted appropriately in referring him to the gastroenterology clinic.