

SPSO decision report

Case: 201405902, Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board

Sector: health

Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis

Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that the board failed to take reasonable steps to diagnose and treat his elbow pain after he raised concern at Ayrshire Central Hospital in August 2013. He was unhappy with the time taken to carry out nerve conduction tests at the end of December 2013, which indicated that he had cubital tunnel syndrome (nerve compression). He was not given the results until six weeks later and was then referred for specialist surgical review. Mr C felt that, had his diagnosis been reached sooner and surgery carried out promptly, additional nerve damage would not have occurred.

We took independent advice from two advisers: a physiotherapist and an orthopaedic consultant (a specialist in conditions involving the musculoskeletal system). We noted that the board apologised to Mr C for a delay in Mr C receiving his results and they took reasonable action to carry out a review and make improvements in this respect. However, we identified that when Mr C first presented with his elbow pain, the physiotherapist did not take into account the possibility of nerve compression. In addition, whilst a different physiotherapist noted motor deficit two weeks later, they did not arrange immediate referral to a specialist in accordance with the board's musculoskeletal guidance. Instead, they raised concern in an email to an orthopaedic doctor but did not mention all the relevant symptoms. We also found records indicating that there had been earlier discussion about referring Mr C for nerve conduction tests at the beginning of September 2013 but this was not organised until four weeks later. Whilst we concluded that staff acted unreasonably in not referring Mr C for specialist review from the outset and arranging the tests sooner, there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that he sustained additional nerve damage.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- apologise to Mr C for the failings identified;
- share the findings with the physiotherapy and orthopaedic staff involved in Mr C's care; and
- consider reviewing their musculoskeletal guidance to ensure that appropriate information is provided on cubital tunnel syndrome as a specific condition.