

SPSO decision report

Case: 201500884, A Dentist in the Lothian NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C sustained nerve damage following dental treatment she received in 2014. She also complained that the dentist failed to respond to the Edinburgh Dental Institute (EDI)'s request for further information after she was referred there for further review.

We sought independent advice from a general dental practitioner. We considered that the symptoms Mrs C experienced in October 2014 were consistent with accidental injection of sodium hypochlorite (a solution used to clean out the root canal) through the end of the root of her tooth. This is a rare but recognised complication of the treatment and is not in itself evidence of unreasonable care. We also considered that prior to 2015, it was a risk which would not normally have been discussed with patients before treatment. We did, however, identify the likelihood that the dentist had not used a rubber dam (a device used to isolate the root canal and protect a patient's airway) and concluded that this was unreasonable practice even though it would not have prevented the nerve damage caused. We upheld this part of Mrs C's complaint. We found no evidence to demonstrate that the dentist had not responded to any requests for information from the EDI and we did not uphold this part of Mrs C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the dentist:

- apologise to Mrs C for the failure to use a rubber dam; and
- takes steps to ensure the use of a rubber dam.