

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201501397, Lothian NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** appointments / admissions (delay / cancellation / waiting lists)  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C complained on behalf of his partner (Miss A) about the delay in her parathyroid surgery (surgery to remove glands next to the thyroid which secrete a hormone that regulates calcium levels in a person's body), and the board's communication with them about this. Mr C said the consultant physician at the endocrine clinic at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh who first dealt with Miss A's case told them the surgery would take place within approximately ten weeks of their initial appointment. Mr C said he attended appointments with Miss A (who is profoundly deaf) about her care and communicated with the board on her behalf about the delay in her surgery.

We obtained independent medical advice on the complaint from a consultant in general medicine. The adviser said there was an avoidable delay in the consultant physician at the endocrine clinic arranging Miss A's referral to the consultant surgeon who was to perform her operation. The adviser also said that once the referral was made, there was an avoidable delay in Miss A's surgical review with the consultant surgeon taking place and these delays resulted in an avoidable delay in Miss A's surgery. Mr C and the consultant physician gave differing accounts of what was said about when the surgery would take place. In the absence of supporting evidence from any independent witnesses, it was not possible for us to conclude what was said at the consultation.

The adviser said the board had a responsibility for keeping records of communications with patients and, on balance, they considered that the board should have been able to provide a clear record of the communication with Mr C on Miss A's case. As they could not, the adviser said the communication by the board was unreasonable.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- feed back our decisions on both complaints to the staff involved;
- take steps to ensure that, in future, staff record emails and phone calls made by patients or their representatives in the patients' electronic records; and
- provide Mr C and Miss A with a written apology for the failings identified in both complaints.