

SPSO decision report

Case: 201501787, Lothian NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C was referred to a specialist bone clinic in relation to ongoing pain symptoms, but the doctors were not able to find an explanation for this and told Mrs C she had chronic pain syndrome. Mrs C was concerned that the doctors did not undertake any tests or investigations before concluding this.

Mrs C asked for a second opinion from a specialist outside the board's area, and they arranged an out-of-area referral. However, the out-of-area specialist was not able to offer any further explanation for Mrs C's pain. Mrs C was concerned that this was because the referral letter to the specialist was factually inaccurate and did not explain why a second opinion was being sought. She did not consider this review constituted a second opinion.

Mrs C complained to the board with a number of questions about her treatment. The board responded to this, but Mrs C was not satisfied with the response and asked a number of additional questions. The board said they had already responded to the best of their ability, and suggested that instead of engaging in correspondence they could arrange a further out-of-area referral for Mrs C if she wished. Mrs C agreed to this and a referral was arranged, but this specialist declined to see Mrs C as she had already been reviewed by two experienced doctors.

After taking independent medical advice from a consultant physician and rheumatologist, we did not uphold Mrs C's complaints about care and treatment. We found that the relevant investigations had already been arranged when Mrs C was reviewed in the bone clinic and it was reasonable for them to rely on the results of these. We also found that the referral was reasonable and Mrs C had received a second opinion (although this did not find any explanation for her pain). While we found the board's reply to Mrs C's complaint was reasonable, we were critical of delays and several administrative failings in their handling of the complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- apologise to Mrs C for the complaints handling failings we found; and
- review their processes for handling repeat complaints correspondence (to ensure a quick and accurate response is given when a person has already completed the complaints handling procedure).