

SPSO decision report

Case: 201507772, A Medical Practice in the Fife NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: policy / administration
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained that she was unreasonably asked by her medical practice to pay for a travel assessment before she could access typhoid vaccinations for her family. Mrs C said her family travelled regularly and that she kept an accurate record of her family's vaccination history. Mrs C said the practice's assessment had merely confirmed that typhoid vaccinations were required.

The practice said they had been advised by the British Medical Association that such a travel assessment was acceptable. They believed they were acting in line with the charging structure set out in their contract with the board and that this allowed them to charge for the assessment carried out before the vaccinations were given. The practice said it was appropriate to insist that a clinician determine which travel vaccinations the patient required and that whilst different practices had different approaches to charging, theirs remained appropriate.

We took independent advice from a GP adviser. They noted that the provision of travel vaccines fell under the 'additional services' section of the General Medical Services (GMS) contract. We found that the practice had acted inappropriately in charging a fee. As the service was funded, the practice could not charge for access. We therefore upheld Mrs C's complaint.

The board said that they were unaware of the practice's charging structure. They considered the practice's interpretation of what they could charge for to be inaccurate and said they had contacted the practice and asked them to review their charging procedures. They said that the practice had agreed to make necessary arrangements to comply with the statement of financial entitlement (SFE) relating to travel vaccination under the GP contract.

Recommendations

We recommended that the practice:

- provide evidence they have ceased charging for all pre-vaccination forms and that their arrangements now comply with the SFE;
- reimburse the fee paid;
- notify their respective GP appraisers of this complaint and provide evidence the GPs have familiarised themselves with the correct contractual procedure;
- ensure the practice manager has received additional training on travel vaccinations and interpretation of GMS regulations; and
- apologise to Mrs C for the failings identified in this investigation.