

SPSO decision report

Case: 201507972, Highland NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: appointments / admissions (delay / cancellation / waiting lists)
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about the time he had to wait for a gastroscopy procedure (a procedure where a thin, flexible telescope called an endoscope is used to look inside the gullet and stomach) at Raigmore Hospital. Mr C was referred for the procedure by his GP after he complained of symptoms of indigestion. Mr C was offered an appointment 16 weeks after referral, but when he attended the appointment the procedure could not go ahead as the endoscopy department did not have the required equipment available. Mr C complained to the board about the delay and expressed concern that the anticoagulation medication he was taking (treatment with drugs that reduce the body's ability to form clots in the blood) could have posed a risk to his health in the period while he waited for the procedure. The board apologised to Mr C and noted that the equipment was not available at the previous appointment because of a delay in the return of endoscopes following decontamination.

We took independent medical advice from a consultant physician who was critical that the time between referral and the procedure exceeded the target waiting time set by the Scottish Government. The adviser also noted that the appointment booking process should not have required two interventions from Mr C's GP. The adviser concluded that because of the delay in the procedure, Mr C suffered from his symptoms longer than was necessary, which was unreasonable. In view of this, we upheld this complaint and made two recommendations.

Mr C also complained that the board did not fully address the concerns he raised in his complaint and had exceeded their complaint response time target. The board acknowledged that a letter explaining the delay was not sent in this instance, and stated that staff have since been reminded about the requirement to send holding letters when appropriate. We were critical that, once they had received Mr C's complaint, the board failed to quickly offer Mr C an appointment, and therefore an opportunity was missed to reduce Mr C's waiting time for the procedure. We therefore also upheld this complaint and made four recommendations.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- advise us of the action taken to address the waiting time delays for the endoscopy procedure identified in this case;
- provide evidence that quality improvement work regarding increasing turnaround time for decontamination has taken place;
- feed back our findings in relation to the handling of Mr C's complaint to relevant staff; and
- provide Mr C with an apology for the failings identified in this investigation.