

SPSO decision report

Case: 201600143, Highland NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained about the palliative care and treatment provided to her late husband (Mr A) at Cowal Community Hospital. Mrs C highlighted concerns about the prescription of pain relief, arrangements for a blood transfusion and communication with the family. Mrs C particularly felt that meetings with staff had been misrepresented in his medical records. She also complained that the board had failed to handle her complaints reasonably.

As the doctors who cared for Mr A at the hospital were general practitioners, we took independent advice from a GP adviser. The advice we received was that Mr A's pain relief had been appropriately reviewed and adjusted, and that there had been no indication that a blood transfusion was necessary. We did not uphold these aspects of Mrs C's complaint.

We did not uphold Mrs C's complaints about communication or meetings. We found evidence that there had been regular and appropriate communication with Mr A's family, although we acknowledged that Mrs C's recollection differed from that recorded in the medical notes and other records. The advice we received was that the actions taken by the board were reasonable, on the basis of what was recorded in the relevant records.

We upheld Mrs C's complaint about the way that the board had handled her complaint. We found that there was an inaccuracy in the final response around the timeframe of Mr A dying and the complaint being raised. We also found that an issue Mrs C had raised had not been fully addressed when the board responded to her concerns. We made two recommendations to address these issues, including one regarding the new model complaints handling procedure introduced in April 2017.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mrs C for the complaints handling issues identified. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at <https://www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance>.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- In keeping with the new complaints handling procedure, complaint responses should be accurate and address the points made by the complainant.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.