

SPSO decision report

Case: 201701048, Tayside NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Miss C complained about the medical treatment her late mother (Ms A) received at Ninewells Hospital before her death. Ms A had been admitted to hospital on three occasions with exacerbation of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD, a disease of the lungs in which the airways become narrowed). It was then diagnosed that she had heart failure and Ms A died a week after her final admission. Miss C considered that there had been a delay in making a diagnosis of heart failure, as staff wrongly assumed that Ms A had COPD and delayed in carrying out the tests that showed she had heart failure.

We took independent advice from a consultant in acute medicine and from a consultant radiologist. We found that the investigations carried out in the hospital had been reasonable and appropriate and that it was reasonable that staff initially considered Ms A had COPD. We noted that it can be difficult to distinguish between heart and lung disease, especially when both are present together, and that there had not been an unreasonable delay in making a diagnosis. We did not uphold this aspect of Miss C's complaint.

Miss C also complained that staff had failed to adequately communicate with her and Ms A. The board had accepted that there were failings in relation to communication and we upheld this aspect of Miss C's complaint. We found that the main impact of this was that Miss C was not prepared for Ms A's sudden death. However, we were satisfied that the board had apologised for and addressed these failings whilst they were dealing with Miss C's complaint and we did not make any recommendations in relation to this matter.