

SPSO decision report

Case: 201701134, Fife NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Miss C complained to us on behalf of her late mother (Mrs A). Mrs A was admitted to Victoria Hospital with stomach pain, which was thought to have been gallstones (small stones that form in the gallbladder). Mrs A was later diagnosed with cancer. Miss C complained that there was an unreasonable delay in diagnosing Mrs A's cancer.

We took independent advice from a consultant surgeon and a consultant radiologist. We found that the board carried out appropriate investigations into Mrs A's condition. However, we found that the board's interpretation of a scan was not reasonable as the scan results raised the possibility that Mrs A had liver cancer or a liver infection and that further investigations should have been recommended as a result of this. We found that there was an unreasonable delay in giving Mrs A an appointment to discuss those scan results and we noted that the board had identified this failing. We considered that the failings in the interpretation of Mrs A's scan led to an unreasonable delay in diagnosing her cancer. Therefore, we upheld this aspect of Miss C's complaint.

Miss C also complained about an unreasonable delay in proceeding with surgery on Mrs A's gallbladder. We found that it was appropriate that the board tried to treat her without surgery first. We, therefore, did not uphold this aspect of Miss C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Miss C for the delay in diagnosing Mrs A's cancer. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance.

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- As far as possible, scan findings should be accurately reported.

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.