

SPSO decision report

Case: 201701250, Tayside NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C complained that the board unreasonably failed to identify her hip fracture. Following a referral to Ninewells hospital, Ms C was reviewed by a consultant orthopaedic and trauma surgeon who considered that she had strained a ligament in her knee. She was then referred for physiotherapy for mobilisation and rehabilitation. Ms C was reviewed over the following months and developed progressively worsening pain. A subsequent x-ray identified a hip fracture.

We took independent advice from a consultant orthopaedic surgeon and a physiotherapist. Ms C noted that no x-ray was performed at the consultation with the surgeon. The board said that an appropriate examination was carried out, and that this examination gave no indication that an x-ray was required. The orthopaedic surgeon adviser said that the examination was not recorded in sufficient detail in Ms C's medical record, and that it provided inadequate evidence that a hip fracture was excluded.

Ms C also raised concern about the subsequent physiotherapy appointments. The physiotherapist adviser considered that, throughout the physiotherapy sessions, there were indications that the initial diagnosis of ligament strain of the knee may have been incorrect. We found that there was a failure to re-evaluate the situation in light of Ms C's increasing pain and deteriorating mobility. We considered that this contributed to the delay in identifying the hip fracture. Finally, we found that there were failings in recording of assessments and pain scores during these appointments. However, we noted that the board had acknowledged this failing and had taken steps to address this.

Overall, we found that the board unreasonably failed to identify Ms C's hip fracture and upheld the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Ms C for unreasonably failing to identify her hip fracture and for the failings in record-keeping. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at <https://www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance>.

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

- Staff should carry out full and appropriate examinations and assessments, and record these in contemporary records.

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.