

SPSO decision report

Case: 201702428, Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board - Acute Services Division
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about the clinical treatment he received at Inverclyde Royal Hospital. Specifically, that the treatment that he had to remove debris from his ear (known as microsuction) caused him to develop tinnitus (a ringing or buzzing noise in the ears) and that he should have had a hearing test before the treatment. Mr C also complained that questions which he raised at a follow-up clinic appointment were not fully responded to.

In response to the complaint, the board did not identify any failings in treatment or the communication that took place with Mr C about the questions he had raised at a follow-up appointment. The board also said that tinnitus is not a recognised complication of microsuction.

We took independent advice from a consultant ear, nose and throat surgeon. We found that the treatment Mr C received was of a reasonable standard and in accordance with ear care guidance issued by Health Improvement Scotland. In addition, we found that there was no requirement in terms of consent guidance issued by the General Medical Council to warn patients of the risk of tinnitus, as it is a less serious side effect that does not occur frequently with this type of procedure. We did not uphold this aspect of the complaint. However, we considered that tinnitus is a recognised risk of any noise or mechanical trauma to the ear and provided feedback to the board that they may wish to consider displaying a notice or providing a leaflet for patients in this respect.

Mr C should have received responses to the questions he had raised at his follow-up appointment. Therefore, we upheld this part of his complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr C for not responding fully to the points he raised. 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:

- Full responses should be provided to patients regarding their care and treatment, either in writing or verbally, with documentation to demonstrate what was discussed.