

SPSO decision report

Case: 201704604, Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about his care and treatment when he attended Crosshouse Hospital after experiencing stroke-like symptoms. Mr C was taken to the emergency department (ED) and was told he would be admitted to a ward but he was discharged a few hours later. Mr C suffered a seizure later that day and was returned to hospital by ambulance. He was admitted to the high dependency unit and kept in for two days for investigations. Mr C complained that it was not reasonable for staff to discharge him when he first attended. He was concerned he was not monitored frequently and that staff did not give him a clear explanation or diagnosis.

The board acknowledged that nurses should have recorded more frequent ward rounds and apologised for this. However, they explained that Mr C was also kept under observation via electronic monitors. The board considered that the medical care and treatment was reasonable. Mr C was unhappy with this response and brought his complaint to us.

We took independent advice from a consultant in emergency medicine, a consultant in general medicine and a nurse. We found that Mr C was given prompt treatment for tonsillitis (inflammation of the tonsils) and suspected meningitis (infection of the coverings of the brain). We noted that this was investigated further but it was found that he did not have meningitis. Mr C was followed up by the neurology department (branch of medicine that deals with the anatomy, functions, and disorders of nerves and the nervous system) after his discharge and was diagnosed with hemiplegic migraine (a rare and serious type of migraine that has symptoms similar to those of a stroke). We considered that Mr C's medical care and the decision to discharge him was reasonable. We did not uphold these aspects of Mr C's complaint.

In relation to the nursing care Mr C received, we found that nurses had not clearly recorded what action was taken when he had a high National Early Warning Score (NEWS, an indicator of a patient's overall health) or why the plan had changed from admitting him to discharging him from the ED. We upheld this aspect of Mr C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr C for not repeating his observations before discharge and for the gaps in record-keeping. 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:

- Nurses should record what action is taken in response to an elevated NEWS and repeat the NEWS check before discharging the patient.
- Where a plan of care changes, the nursing records should show the reasoning behind this.