

SPSO decision report

Case: 201708551, Tayside NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: appointments / admissions (delay / cancellation / waiting lists)
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mrs C was referred by her GP to the orthopaedic department (the area of medicine which deals with the musculoskeletal system) at Ninewells Hospital for consideration of knee replacement surgery. However, there were problems with the communications from the board which resulted in her missing a scheduled out-patient clinic appointment. Mrs C questioned this with the board and she was told that arrangements had been made to reschedule the clinic appointment. However, she was then told that the rescheduled appointment had been cancelled and that the consultant had carried out a virtual assessment of the symptoms reported by the GP, and had subsequently discharged her. Mrs C complained that it was unreasonable that she had been discharged from the orthopaedic clinic without a face-to-face consultation.

We took independent advice from an orthopaedic consultant. We found that, on occasions, it can be appropriate for clinicians to carry out virtual assessments based on the information provided from the GP referral and that, in Mrs C's case, it was reasonable to discharge her from the clinic without a face-to-face consultation. We did not uphold the complaint. However, we were critical of the letter sent to Mrs C by the consultant as it did not contain sufficient advice as to what alternative options could be considered, and we fed this back to the board for their consideration.