

SPSO decision report

Case: 201800060, A Medical Practice in the Lothian NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about the care and treatment his late wife (Mrs A) received from the practice during a number of attendances.

We took independent advice from GP adviser. We found that the care provided to Mrs A by the practice, when she presented with a swelling in her groin and a lump on her breast, to be reasonable.

Mrs A had also attended the practice with a swelling in her neck. We found that there was a failure by the practice to document a full history relating to the neck swelling, how long it was there for, and to consider further investigation of the swelling and safety netting. We considered this to be below a reasonable standard and upheld this aspect of Mr C's complaint. However, we also acknowledged that by the time Mrs A presented with the swelling in her groin, she already had incurable cancer. While earlier referral for investigation of the neck swelling could have possibly led to an earlier diagnosis, it was unlikely to have changed Mrs A's overall outcome.

Mr C also complained that Mrs A had been treated in an unsympathetic and dismissive manner by the practice, and said that he and Mrs A were unaware that she had suspected heart failure. Our investigation found no evidence of this.

Mr C also complained about the way in which the practice had responded to his complaint. We found that the practice responded to Mr C within a reasonable time, and did not identify any inaccurate information in their response. We also acknowledged that the practice had offered to meet with Mr C. We did not uphold this aspect of the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Mr C for the failure to document a full history relating to Mrs A's neck swelling; how long it was there for; or to consider further investigation of the neck swelling and safety netting. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsa.org.uk/information-leaflets.

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

- Relevant staff should ensure they review and are aware of General Medical Council Good Medical practice guidance and the Scottish cancer referral guidelines on Head and Neck Cancers.

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.