

SPSO decision report

Case: 201808735, Fife NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: communication / staff attitude / dignity / confidentiality
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Ms C attended hospital for minor surgery under anaesthetic. She said that she made it very clear in advance of attending for the surgery that she did not want to have any opioid drugs (common pain relief) administered. However, despite communicating that prior to and on the day of surgery, an opioid was administered whilst Ms C was under anaesthetic. Ms C also had concerns about the staff present in the anaesthetic room. She said no one introduced themselves or explained their role to her; she did not know who one individual was even though they squeezed her arm as a method of tourniquet (device for stopping the flow of blood through a vein or artery) during the insertion of the cannula; and she questioned the appropriateness of the method of tourniquet used.

We took independent advice from a clinical adviser. It was noted that staff denied not having introduced themselves to Ms C. They said they had acknowledged Ms C's anxieties and to help with that she was moved to first on the theatre list. We also reviewed a patient leaflet produced by the Faculty of Pain Medicine which indicated that squeezing a patient's arm was an acceptable method of tourniquet.

In turning to Ms C's concern that she was administered an opioid against her expressed wishes, the board confirmed the anaesthetist was aware of Ms C's previous unpleasant experience with morphine and recalled reassuring her that they would not use that drug or any long acting opiates. They were not aware that Ms C wished to avoid all opioids. We found that it would have been unreasonable not to administer pain relieving drugs to Ms C during her surgery, because she could have suffered acute pain and distress.

Finally, we were satisfied that the board had taken reasonable steps to identify the staff present in the anaesthetic room. In light of the information we saw in Ms C's case, we did not uphold the complaints.