

SPSO decision report

Case: 201809644, Scottish Ambulance Service
Sector: Health
Subject: failure to send ambulance / delay in sending ambulance
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained that the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) failed to respond reasonably to the request for an emergency ambulance service for their child (A). C expressed concern about the overall time taken for A to be taken to hospital; which was approximately two hours from the original call being made requesting an emergency ambulance, to A arriving at hospital and being reviewed by a doctor. C also complained about how SAS responded to their complaint about that matter.

SAS upheld C's complaint on the basis of a longer wait than would have been expected for this category of call and offered an apology for that wait. They explained that this was a very busy time for the service but confirmed that a call audit had concluded that the call was handled very well and was of high compliance with their dispatch system.

We took independent advice from a paramedic. We found that there were concerns with SAS's response for an emergency ambulance, including:

The delay in elevating the response level which relied on the subjective opinion of a non-clinical call handler.

The lack of clinical advisor input into the call which could have negated the limitations of the system and possibly changed the level of acuity, and as such the response time and time taken for A to reach hospital.

The decision of the original ambulance crew to wait on the second responding crew to transport A.

Therefore, we upheld the complaint that SAS failed to respond reasonably to the request for an emergency ambulance to attend to A.

In relation to complaint handling, we found that SAS's response to C's complaint was appropriate. We also noted that their apology was in line with SPSO guidance. Therefore, we considered that SAS reasonably responded to C's complaint and we did not uphold this complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for failing to respond reasonably to the request for an emergency ambulance to attend to A. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

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

- Clinical advisors should be able to assess a patient's condition in line with current guidance - which

provides that a clinical advisor's first point of contact should be at 45 minutes from the time of call within the yellow patient cohort. If a decision is made for this not to happen, the reasons for that decision should be clearly recorded.

- Patients should be transported by ambulance using the appropriate harness.

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.