

SPSO decision report

Case: 201810560, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, no recommendations

Summary

C complained on behalf of their family member (A). A had several admissions to hospital with complaints of abdominal and back pain. They underwent a laparoscopic cholecystectomy (removal of the gallbladder) but their symptoms did not improve. Following an MRI scan, a spinal infection was suspected and antibiotics were commenced, which resulted in a C.diff (a bacterium that can cause symptoms ranging from diarrhoea to life-threatening inflammation of the colon) infection. This type of infection most commonly affects people who have been treated with antibiotics. Further scans were then carried out which showed suspicious lesions on A's lung, and they were diagnosed with cancer.

C was concerned that, despite the tests and investigations arranged during A's time in hospital, it took around six months before cancer was diagnosed. In addition, C was unhappy with the board's handling of their complaints.

We took independent advice from an appropriately qualified adviser. We found that there were frequent and detailed reviews of A's care, and appropriate management plans were made and carried out. A's cancer could only reasonably have been expected in the last admission, and although there was an initial incorrect diagnosis of infection, this was a reasonable one to make at the time, and it was then corrected once A's symptoms changed and they failed to respond to the initial treatment. We did not uphold this aspect of the complaint.

In looking at the board's handling of C's complaint, the complexity of the issues that were raised meant that the level of investigation required impacted on the timescales. The responses issued to C demonstrated that the complaints were taken seriously by the board and the matters were investigated thoroughly. Overall, it was a lengthy process, with some significant delays, which was acknowledged by the board who apologised to C. We upheld the complaint but did not make any further recommendations.