

SPSO decision report

Case: 201900072, Grampian NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

C, who has diabetes, damaged their foot. C was diagnosed with a broken 4th metatarsal (one of the long bones in the foot). A scan was taken and C was seen at a fracture clinic. C was unhappy with the assessment and the lack of further scans at the fracture clinic appointment.

We took independent advice from an orthopaedic surgeon (a medical expert who treats patients with problems in their muscles, bones, joints and other related structures). We found that, due to C's diabetes, C had a high risk of developing a delayed or non-union of the fracture and that this was not recognised by the doctor. Scans should have been taken at the clinic appointment to monitor healing and C was unreasonably discharged before the fracture was healed. Therefore, we upheld this aspect of the complaint.

C also complained about the management of their diabetes while they were awaiting surgery on their foot. We took independent advice from a nurse. We found that the management of C's diabetes was reasonable. C had a libre device which monitored their blood sugar levels. While the documentation of the management of C's diabetes should have been clearer, it was reasonable for C to continue to monitor their blood sugar levels on the ward and report the results to staff. We did not uphold this aspect of C's complaint.

Lastly, C complained that there was an unreasonable delay in their surgery being carried out. We found that the initial surgery was delayed due to equipment being unavailable. The surgery was a planned procedure and therefore the equipment should have been ordered prior to the day of surgery. When C's surgery was rescheduled, C was unreasonably placed on the trauma list when they should have been placed on the urgent planned list, where there would have been less likelihood C's surgery would be cancelled. We upheld this aspect of C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for the failings as identified in the appointment and for the delay in carrying out surgery. 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:

- Diabetic fracture healing should be appropriately assessed.
- Ordering/procurement systems are in place to ensure necessary equipment is available in advance of operations.
- Surgery should be scheduled on the appropriate list.

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.