

SPSO decision report



Case: 201900922, Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board - Acute Services Division
Sector: Health
Subject: policy / administration
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Ms C was referred by her GP to the board's Assisted Conception Service (ACS). At her appointment with ACS months later, she was told that it was too late to proceed with screening/referral to the Assisted Reproductive (ART) Clinic tertiary centre, as the waiting time for an appointment at the ART is five to six months, by which time she would be over the age limit (the upper limit to be eligible for in vitro fertilisation (IVF, a process of fertilisation where an egg is combined with sperm outside the body) treatment on the NHS). Ms C complained that, according to the information on the board's website, she should have been eligible for NHS fertility treatment.

We took independent advice from a consultant gynaecologist (a doctor who specialises in the female reproductive system) and from a GP. We found that the information on the board's website regarding timescales for referral for fertility treatment had originally been incorrect, as it stated that a patient need only be referred prior to their 42nd birthday, as opposed to needing to be screened before their 42nd birthday. However, we found that the board had amended this information in order to ensure it was accurate. Whilst we welcomed this, we were concerned that the incorrect information was not noted by the board until drawn to their attention by our office.

We considered that, whilst changes had been made, the information on the website was still unclear as it did not explain the steps involved in screening, and the waiting times involved in these steps. We also found that the board's position regarding how they communicate this information to GPs is not in line with current primary care practice. We upheld this aspect of Ms C's complaint.

With regard to Ms C's complaint that she was unreasonably denied fertility treatment, we found that Ms C did not meet the criteria, and therefore it was reasonable to deny her fertility treatment. Therefore, we did not uphold this aspect of the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Ms C that the information on their website regarding timescales for referral for IVF is unclear. 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:

- The information available to patients and GPs should make clear the referral pathway, screening process, and timescales involved in these steps, are explained clearly; including how long before the patients 42nd birthday they may need to be referred to complete the screening process in time.

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.