

SPSO decision report



Case: 201903128, Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / Diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about treatment provided by the board's community eating disorder service. They complained about the length of time it took the board to diagnose them and about the various referrals among clinicians involved in their care. C said that their mental health had deteriorated during the treatment period; their eating disorder was exacerbated and they had suicidal thoughts.

We took independent advice from a consultant psychiatrist. We found that C presented with a number of mental health issues and had been managed at times by different teams within the mental health service. Although there was a period during which there was a lack of clarity regarding the overall management of C's care, generally we considered C's treatment to be reasonable and consistent with good practice. We found that the assessment of complex psychiatric presentations, where there is a history of multiple mental health issues, can be prolonged, with diagnosis and treatment modified or refined over time. Therefore, we did not uphold this aspect of C's complaint. We did, however, provide feedback to the board on short-comings identified: failure to obtain permission for a student to attend an assessment, which caused C distress and anxiety, and poor communication in relation to treatment aims during the initial phase of treatment.

C also complained about the board's handling of their complaint. When the board first responded to C's complaint they failed to address most of C's questions. C's MSP became involved and the board then responded in full around eight months after C complained. We were critical of the board's complaints handling, noting that the matters C complained about were of a serious and sensitive nature and the delays in responding added to their distress. Although much of the delay in preparing the response was outwith the complaints team's control, we found that they could have kept C more regularly updated. We upheld this aspect of C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for the unreasonable handling of their complaint, with a recognition of the impact the delays had on C. 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:

- Complaints should be handled in line with the Model Complaints Handling Procedure. In the event that designated timescales cannot be met, complainants should be kept updated. Complaints should be responded to fully.

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.