

SPSO decision report

Case: 201903984, Scottish Ambulance Service
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / Diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) after calling an ambulance for their spouse (A). The ambulance crew that initially attended C diagnosed that A's condition was not sufficiently serious to require hospital attendance and instead requested that a GP attend instead. C considered that this was unreasonable as, when the GP did later attend, they requested a further ambulance to take A to hospital. C was also concerned about the SAS' handling of their subsequent complaints.

We took independent advice from an emergency medicine clinician. We found that the original ambulance crew had carried out a detailed diagnostic investigation and reasonably concluded that requesting a doctor to attend the home was the best option. Therefore, we did not uphold C's complaints in that respect.

However, our investigation did raise concerns about the SAS' complaints handling. We found that there were unexplained inaccuracies in their response and also that they had failed to clarify the nature of C's complaints when this was not clear from the complaint correspondence, leading to a misunderstanding of the nature of the complaint. We upheld this aspect of C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for failing to accurately respond to their complaints. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Where a complaint is not entirely clear, clarification should be sought from the complainant to ensure a full and accurate response.

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.