

SPSO decision report

Case: 201906538, Highland NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

C was referred to the ear, nose and throat (ENT) service by their GP practice because they had been suffering from worsening headaches, balance problems and nausea. C was reviewed several times by the ENT service.

C later returned to the practice because their symptoms were not improving. A referral was made to a private healthcare provider for C to see a neurologist. An MRI scan was arranged and following that, C was diagnosed with a brain tumour.

C complained to the board. They felt that the ENT service had failed to adequately investigate their symptoms and, because of that, they failed to diagnose C's brain tumour. In response, the board confirmed it was felt that C was experiencing vestibular migraine (a nervous system problem that causes repeated dizziness), based on the symptoms. It was noted that a neurological examination was not performed at the initial examination, but was carried out at a subsequent review. The board accepted it would have been preferable to perform the neurological examination at the initial appointment, although in C's case it was unlikely to have led to an earlier diagnosis.

We took independent advice from a clinical adviser who is an ENT consultant. We found that the tumour was a rare find in what was a common presentation of vertigo and headaches. It was difficult to know whether or not there would have been any earlier cues to instigate the MRI scan. We noted information from C's first encounter with the ENT service was limited but, overall, the evidence available suggested that the initial diagnosis and treatment were reasonable.

We did not uphold the complaint.