

SPSO decision report

Case: 201906914, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C developed severe left arm pain and 'pins and needles' in the fingers of their left hand. Around a year later, C began to experience the same problems with their right side. Their GP was concerned their symptoms were bilateral and they urgently referred C to the board's neurosurgery service (specialists in surgery on the nervous system, especially the brain and spinal cord).

C complained that the board failed to respond to their GP referral in a reasonable manner. In particular, that the board unreasonably downgraded the urgency of the referral. During our investigation, we took independent advice from a specialist in orthopaedic medicine (the treatment of diseases and injuries of the musculoskeletal system).

We found that C did not have any red flags or signs of a serious underlying condition so they did not require to be seen urgently. We also found that C's referral was appropriately redirected to orthopaedics. However, we noted that there was an unreasonable delay (over five weeks) in telling C's GP that their referral had been vetted and redirected. In light of this delay, we upheld the complaint. We also found that the board did not adequately respond to C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for the delay in responding to C's GP about their urgent referral and for not adequately addressing their complaint. 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:

- If an urgent referral has been redirected, there should be timely communication with the GP so patients can be updated.

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.