

SPSO decision report

Case: 202005405, Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about the care and treatment provided by the board to their parent (A), who was admitted to hospital with severe back pain after suffering a suspected fall and later diagnosed with osteoporosis (a condition that affects the bones, causing become fragile and more likely to break). C complained about the physiotherapy and occupational therapy assessments carried out during A's admission, the communication by staff and a lack of recognition of A's cognitive impairment (a condition that affects the ability to think, concentrate, formulate ideas, reason and remember). C also complained about the lack of written information about osteoporosis/fragility fractures and how they should be managed after A's discharge, and A's follow up care, in particular, the failure to carry out a DEXA scan (a special type of x-ray that measures the density of bones).

In order to investigate C's complaint, we took independent advice from a trauma and orthopaedics (conditions involving the musculoskeletal system) adviser. We found that it was reasonable, in light of cognitive assessments undertaken by A, for staff to have taken the information A provided at face value. It was also reasonable in light of current practice and guidance for the board not to have provided A with written information about the management of osteoporosis upon discharge. We also found that the decision not to offer a DEXA scan was appropriate given the diagnosis, and that the appropriate treatment for this type of injury (osteoporosis/fragility fractures) was conservative management and therefore follow up care was not a requirement.

However, we identified a number of failings including that the board unreasonably delayed in starting A's osteoporosis treatment and that there were also failings in communication. In view of these specific failings, we upheld the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C and A for the delay in starting A's osteoporosis treatment. 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:

- There should be a clear treatment pathway in place for patients starting osteoporosis treatment which is based on the relevant national guidance so as to avoid unreasonable delay in the start of their treatment.

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.