

SPSO decision report

Case: 202105712, A Medical Practice in the Fife NHS Board area
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about the care and treatment provided to their relative (A) by the practice.

A attended the practice frequently within a year and was later diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer. A died shortly after. C believed that A's concerns were not properly taken into account when they attended the practice and that A should have been referred sooner for investigations. The practice provided a detailed reply to C, stating their view that A's concerns had been investigated appropriately, and that there had been no indication for a cancer referral.

We took independent advice from a GP. We found that there was no reason to suspect cancer as a possible cause of A's symptoms. However, as symptoms persisted, an urgent cancer referral should have been considered. We found that it was highly unlikely, given the aggressive nature of A's cancer, that the delay in A's diagnosis had any impact on the outcome of A's disease. Although A's initial treatment was reasonable, we found that there were failings in care in that the practice should have made an urgent referral for A sooner. We therefore upheld this complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C, and A's immediate family, for the failure to make a referral for A in line with the Scottish Government guidelines. 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:

- The practice should be familiar with the Scottish Suspected Cancer Referral Guidelines and refer patients for specialist assessment in accordance with the guidelines.

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.