

Case 200701321: A GP, Lothian NHS Board

Summary of Investigation

Category

Health: GP

Overview

The complainant, Mrs C, who suffered from an anal fissure, was concerned that her general practitioner (the GP) waited too long before referring her to hospital and that the GP prescribed Proctosedyl (a cream which is used to reduce pain, inflammation and swelling in rectal lesions) for too long.

Specific complaints and conclusions

The complaints which have been investigated are that the GP:

- (a) waited too long before referring Mrs C to hospital (*not upheld*); and
- (b) prescribed Proctosedyl for too long (*upheld*).

Redress and recommendation

The Ombudsman recommends that the GP:

- (i) reacquaint herself with the use of topical steroids; and
- (ii) apologise to Mrs C for prescribing Proctosedyl for too long.

The GP has accepted the recommendations and will act on them accordingly.

Main Investigation Report

Introduction

1. On 9 August 2007, the Ombudsman received a complaint from a woman, referred to in this report as Mrs C, about the care and treatment she received from her general practitioner (the GP). Mrs C was concerned that the GP had not referred her to hospital quickly enough and that she had prescribed Proctosedyl (a cream which is used to reduce pain, inflammation and swelling in rectal lesions) for too long.

2. The complaints from Mrs C which I have investigated are that the GP:
- (a) waited too long before referring Mrs C to hospital; and
 - (b) prescribed Proctosedyl for too long.

Investigation

3. The investigation of the complaint involved obtaining and reading the complaint correspondence between Mrs C and the GP and Mrs C's medical records. On the clinical aspects of the complaint, I sought the advice of one of the Ombudsman's medical advisers (the Adviser).

4. I have not included in this report every detail investigated but I am satisfied that no matter of significance has been overlooked. Mrs C and the GP were given an opportunity to comment on a draft of this report.

(a) The GP waited too long before referring Mrs C to hospital

5. Mrs C said the GP waited too long before referring her to hospital. She said she first attended the GP with the problem in August 2006 and was only referred in November 2006.

6. The GP stated that a colorectal advice website for GPs advised to treat anal problems with creams for three months and advised against referring patients with anal symptoms to hospital before that. The GP said that Mrs C first attended the surgery with the problem on 15 August 2006 and that she had agreed to refer her on 23 October 2006. A copy of the referral, dated 6 November 2006, was submitted as part of Mrs C's medical records.

7. I asked the Adviser for his comments on this point of complaint. He said that Mrs C was referred to hospital within an appropriate timescale and was definitely not referred too late.

(a) Conclusion

8. The GP has stated that she was following the advice of a colorectal website for GPs by waiting before referring Mrs C to hospital. The Adviser, whose advice I accept, considers that the timescale within which a referral was made was appropriate. In light of this advice, I am satisfied that there was no fault on the GP's part and I do not uphold this complaint.

(b) The GP prescribed Proctosedyl for too long

9. Mrs C said the GP had prescribed Proctosedyl for six months, even though the packet for the cream stated it should be used for no more than seven days at a time.

10. The GP stated that she did not think that Mrs C was using the cream continuously but that she thought she was using it intermittently.

11. I asked the Adviser for his view on this point of complaint. He said that the British National Formulary clearly stated that Proctosedyl should be used for no longer than a week. He considered, therefore, that the GP's repeat prescriptions of Proctosedyl over six months had been inappropriate.

12. With regard to the consequences of this, the Adviser told me that Proctosedyl was an extremely weak steroid and that while steroids were known to cause thinning of the skin, this was normally if they were high potency and used for long periods. The Adviser said that although Mrs C had used Proctosedyl for some time, he considered it unlikely that it had caused skin thinning.

(b) Conclusion

13. The Adviser, whose advice I accept, considered that the GP prescribed Proctosedyl for too long. In light of his clear advice, I uphold this complaint.

(b) Recommendation

14. The Ombudsman recommends that the GP:

- (i) acquaint herself with the use of topical steroids; and
- (ii) apologise to Mrs C for prescribing Proctosedyl for too long.

15. The GP has accepted the recommendations and will act on them accordingly. The Ombudsman asks that the GP notify her when the recommendations have been implemented.

Explanation of abbreviations used

Mrs C	The complainant
The GP	Mrs C's general practitioner
The Adviser	One of the Ombudsman's medical adviser