

SPSO decision report

Case: 201203004, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

When Mrs C 's mother (Mrs A) became unwell, Mrs A's carer contacted Mrs C, who went to her mother's house, and a doctor from NHS 24 (the out-of-hours service) visited. He examined Mrs A and wanted to admit her to hospital but his notes recorded that she strongly refused. He prescribed an antibiotic (a drug used to treat bacterial infection) after asking Mrs C if she knew if her mother had any drug allergies. He also advised Mrs C to get in touch again if her mother's condition deteriorated. He later discovered that she was allergic to the drug he had prescribed, and contacted Mrs C to arrange an alternative. Mrs A, however, died during the night. Mrs C disagreed that her mother had refused hospital admission and felt that the doctor should have known of Mrs A's previous experience of the drug.

Our investigation found that the doctor could not have known of Mrs A's allergy as he did not have access to her emergency care summary. This consists of basic information about a patient (including allergic reactions) and is available in the out-of-hours centre but not in the out-of-hours doctors' vehicles. The doctor was in his vehicle when asked to attend Mrs A. It was clear he took prompt and appropriate action to check her summary when he reached the out-of-hours centre, and to then arrange alternative medication. We took independent medical advice from one of our advisers, who said that the doctor's other actions, such as his examination of Mrs A, were also appropriate. We could not say for sure whether Mrs A had refused to go to hospital, as the accounts were so different. However, we did not uphold the complaint, as we found no grounds to suggest that the doctor's care and treatment (including his decision not to admit Mrs A to hospital) were unreasonable.