

SPSO decision report

Case: 201300569, A Dental Practice in the Forth Valley NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that, due to a high staff turnover within the practice, he had been seen by a number of different dentists over the years. He said that each dentist changed his treatment plan and, as a result, his gum disease was never treated. In responding, the practice noted that the staff turnover was outwith their control. They confirmed that a treatment plan should continue from one dentist to the next unless there were clinical grounds for changing it. They did not comment specifically on Mr C's treatment plan as they did not have his records to hand.

We took independent advice from one of our dental advisers. He said the treatment carried out by the various dentists appeared consistent in that the primary aim was to address Mr C's chronic gum disease. He explained that this was a longstanding condition which progressed to the position where loss of the teeth was inevitable, despite the treatment carried out. He concluded that the treatment provided by the practice was reasonable. We accepted this advice and did not uphold the complaint.

We were concerned, however, that the practice had responded to Mr C's complaint about his dental treatment without specifically referring to his dental records. We also noted that their response had not told Mr C that he could complain to us in the event that he remained dissatisfied. In addition, we noted that the practice sent Mr C's original dental records to us and did not use a secure postal method. In light of these observations, we made some recommendations.

Recommendations

We recommended that the practice:

- apologise to Mr C for the identified shortcomings in their handling of his complaint;
- review their handling of Mr C's complaint with a view to making improvements for future complaints handling. In particular, they should ensure that all available information relevant to the complaint is considered as part of their investigation and all complaint issues raised are fully responded to. They should also ensure that the complaint response includes information about the right to refer a complaint to us and our contact details; and
- review their process for handling secure data with a view to avoiding a repeat occurrence of the issues raised during the course of this investigation.