

SPSO decision report

Case: 201301549, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: policy / administration
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C cared for her late husband (Mr C) at home with assistance from carers, district nurses, Mr C's GP and the board's palliative care (care provided solely to prevent or relieve suffering) team when necessary. On the day Mr C died, Mrs C had phoned the board's palliative care line as her husband was in severe pain. An out-of-hours (OOH) GP arrived within 47 minutes of her call to provide pain relief to Mr C, who died around an hour later. Mrs C complained about the length of time it took for the OOH GP to attend and administer the pain relief.

The palliative care line is part of the board's OOH service and it helps palliative care patients to get help without having to go through NHS 24. It is not an emergency service but the board aims to respond to priority calls within one hour. Mr C was visited within 47 minutes of Mrs C's phone call and, even although Mr C was in a lot of pain, we concluded that this was within a reasonable timescale. We noted that when a palliative care patient is nearing the end of their life, an anticipatory pack of medication is often provided to help with distressing symptoms, such as pain, nausea, agitation and breathlessness. This is, however, a decision for the primary care team involved in the patient's care, not the OOH service. Although we did not uphold the complaint, we made recommendations to address our concerns about this.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- ensure that the relevant primary care team review whether anticipatory care planning was in place for Mr C in line with NHS Scotland Palliative Care Guidelines (March 2012) and, if any areas of improvement are identified, prepare an action plan for implementation.