

SPSO decision report

Case: 201303170, Tayside NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C had an accident at work and was taken to Perth Royal Infirmary A&E, where his back and neck were examined and x-rayed. No bony injuries were identified and Mr C was discharged. He said that he told hospital staff that his arms and shoulders were extremely painful and heavy, but the only test that they carried out was that he was asked to squeeze the doctor's fingers. Mr C continued to have pain in his shoulders and arms and his GP referred him for an MRI scan (magnetic resonance imaging - used to diagnose health conditions affecting organs, tissue and bone). This showed that he had torn the rotator cuffs (the muscles around the shoulder joint) in both shoulders. Mr C continued to have shoulder problems, and complained that the A&E examination was inadequate and did not properly assess the extent of his injuries.

After taking independent advice from one of our medical advisers, we found that Mr C was examined in line with good practice. The range of movement in his arms and shoulders was checked and the finger squeezing test was carried out to check for nerve damage (which might have indicated a neck injury). The examination indicated that Mr C had soft tissue injuries, which would not show up on an x-ray. We did not uphold his complaint, as we found the decision to allow his injuries time to settle, with pain medication, to be appropriate. However, we noted a delay to Mr C's MRI scan and diagnosis when his pain did not resolve and made a recommendation related to this.

Recommendations

We recommended that the Board:

- share our decision with the staff involved in Mr C's treatment and diagnosis with a view to identifying any points of learning that may be used to improve the treatment of future patients; and
- remind their A&E staff of the importance of inviting patients to return to hospital or their GP should their symptoms persist, and of documenting the advice given to patients discharged from their care.