

SPSO decision report

Case: 201304591, A Medical Practice in the Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained to us on behalf of her grandson (Mr A) about Mr A's medical practice. Mrs C did not feel that the practice had taken the appropriate steps to diagnose her grandson's illness. Mr A had attended the practice for consultations for about two months saying that, among other things, he had difficulty swallowing and a feeling of a blockage in his throat. Over the course of these consultations, blood tests were taken and Mr A was treated for anaemia. His symptoms did not improve and the practice referred him to a stomach specialist who found nothing and asked him to return two weeks later.

However, Mr A went to A&E and was admitted to hospital, where an underlying heart condition that would require surgery was diagnosed. While awaiting this surgery, Mr A suffered a stroke. Mrs C said that if the heart condition had been identified more promptly, then Mr A might not have had the stroke.

Although we understood this had been very difficult for Mrs C and Mr A, our role was to consider whether the steps the practice took were reasonable in the circumstances at the time. As part of our investigation, our GP medical adviser reviewed the medical notes and provided us with independent advice. Although he acknowledged how significant Mr A's stroke had been, he explained that the symptoms had not suggested the underlying heart condition that Mr A actually had (which was a very rare condition in otherwise healthy individuals). The adviser also noted that the practice had listened to Mr A's heart when he attended there, and this would have reduced any suspicion of Mr A's underlying condition being heart-related. In light of this advice we did not uphold Mrs C's complaint.