

SPSO decision report

Case: 201304619, A Dentist in the Fife NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment/diagnosis
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C visited his dentist because he had toothache. The dentist found an abscess that was discharging pus from the gumline of the third and fourth teeth on the lower right side of Mr C's mouth. As Mr C was already taking a course of antibiotics prescribed by his GP, the dentist said that he should let the inflammation settle before returning to have the teeth extracted. Mr C returned and his teeth were extracted but the pain and swelling continued. He went for an emergency appointment, and the abscess was found on the first lower right tooth. Mr C was referred to local maxillofacial surgeons (specialists in the diagnosis and treatment of diseases affecting the mouth, jaws, face and neck) who provided intravenous antibiotics before removing all his lower teeth.

Mr C complained that his dentist did not provide reasonable treatment during the first consultation. He said he was not already taking antibiotics and that these were prescribed when he found it necessary to visit his GP having been unable to secure an emergency appointment with his dentist.

We found clear evidence that the antibiotics were prescribed before Mr C visited his dentist. Based on the information available at that time, we were satisfied that the dentist could not provide any immediate treatment, and we did not uphold this complaint. We were, however, critical that the dentist did not take additional x-rays to identify the true location of Mr C's abscess. The failure to do so delayed treatment by around two weeks and so we upheld the complaint that the care and treatment was unreasonable. However, we were satisfied that the two teeth that were extracted had to come out in any case. We found no evidence to suggest that emergency appointments were requested and refused and did not uphold that complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the dentist:

- apologise to Mr C for the delay to the treatment of his abscess; and
- take note of the adviser's comments regarding the need for additional x-rays with a view to identifying any points of learning for future treatment.