

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201305243, Tayside NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** communication / staff attitude / dignity / confidentiality  
**Outcome:** upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Miss A is profoundly deaf and uses British Sign Language (BSL). Ms C, an advocate, complained on her behalf that the board did not arrange a BSL interpreter for her. We found that Miss A was left in Ninewells Hospital without an interpreter for nearly three days, which was unacceptable. The board had initially tried to get an interpreter, but it was then left to Miss A's family to do so. When they could not, the board arranged for an interpreter to attend. There were also problems in ensuring that interpreters were there at the same time as doctors.

The board agreed it is their responsibility, not that of the patient's family, to try to secure an interpreter. In responding to our enquiries, they told us that staff had been made aware of the complaint and knew the process for booking interpreter services. They had added phone numbers for five interpreters to staff guidance. Ward staff had been reminded to escalate to senior staff if they experienced difficulties securing an interpreter out-of-hours. The board also apologised for not providing an interpreter to support Miss A. After Ms C complained to us, they entered into a legal agreement with the Equality and Human Rights Commission and committed to trying to ensure that every patient with additional communication requirements receives the same level of services as those without such requirements. In view of this, although we upheld the complaint, we did not make any recommendations.

Ms C also complained that wards did not display a poster advertising BSL interpreter services. The board told us that all wards are required to display this, but could not confirm that it was displayed in the wards Miss A was in when in hospital. Because of this, on balance we upheld this complaint. However, we did not make recommendations, as the board now carry out a weekly audit of posters, ensuring that they are displayed in every clinical area.