

SPSO decision report

Case: 201400250, Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about the NHS health centre at his prison. He said that the health centre doctors did not provide adequate care and treatment when he sought medical attention for stomach, testicular and rectal (bowel) concerns.

We took independent advice from one of our medical advisers, who is a GP. We found that Mr C had been appropriately examined and assessed in respect of the rectal issues. However, we upheld that part of his complaint because, although Mr C had not been presenting with a clinical picture that suggested bowel cancer, he had visited the health centre several times on the same matter. National guidelines on the diagnosis and management of bowel cancer recommend that a specific blood sample is taken for all patients with persistent or recurring rectal bleeding (bleeding from the anus). That was not done in Mr C's case. Doing this would have better equipped the doctor to decide on the urgency of the referral that he made to the hospital. We also found that the referral letter to the hospital was not sent until two months after the doctor decided on a hospital referral. Although the clinical picture was not suggestive of bowel cancer, the part that rectal bleeding can play in bowel cancer makes that delay worrying. In due course, Mr C attended hospital and was discovered not to have cancer.

We did not uphold Mr C's complaints about the other issues as his medical records showed that the health centre had appropriately examined and assessed him in relation to these and we had no further concerns.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- arrange for the prison health centre to audit a representative sample of their hospital referrals to ensure they are being sent in a timely manner;
- arrange for the prison health centre doctor to undertake a specific educational activity related to anaemia and bowel symptoms, for the purposes of Continuing Professional Development; and
- arrange for the prison health centre doctor to include the case in his annual appraisal.