

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201400454, Forth Valley NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C submitted a request to see a prison dentist, saying that he had severe dental pain. Seven days later, Mr C had not received an appointment and he complained to the board. The next day, Mr C had a triage appointment with a nurse, who arranged an urgent dental appointment three days later. At this appointment the dentist found that the nerve in Mr C's tooth had died, and root canal treatment was required.

The board did not uphold Mr C's complaint, as he had received an appointment by the time this was considered and they found the delay was reasonable for a 'routine referral'. Mr C was dissatisfied with this response, and complained to us about the delay in his dental treatment.

We asked the board why Mr C's referral was classified as 'routine', given that Mr C was not seen by any healthcare professional until his triage appointment a week later. They explained that requests for appointments were reviewed by healthcare staff, and any requests which were considered urgent were seen by a healthcare professional within 24 hours.

After taking independent advice from our dental adviser, we upheld Mr C's complaint. We found that the board did not follow their guidance on referrals, as Mr C's referral should have been classified as 'urgent' and he should have been seen within 24 hours. We also found that it was unreasonable for the board to classify the referral as routine without actually reviewing Mr C, given that the symptoms he described were in the 'urgent' category.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- issue a written apology to Mr C for the failure to properly classify his dental request and the delay in issuing him a dental appointment;
- review their procedures for classifying dental referrals, to ensure that all dental cases are reviewed by a healthcare professional within the time-frames required under the Prison Care Pathway guidance; and
- consider clarifying their guidance on the 'Urgent Care' pathway to make it clear that the 24 hour time-frame refers to the patient seeing a healthcare professional, rather than dental treatment being provided.