

SPSO decision report

Case: 201401558, Lanarkshire NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C was treated for appendicitis at Monklands Hospital. As part of his treatment, he was given antibiotics, including gentamicin, intravenously (directly into a vein) for ten days. During and after this treatment, Mr C experienced symptoms of dizziness and difficulty with his balance. He saw an ear, nose and throat consultant, who diagnosed him with permanent damage to his hearing and balance, possibly as a result of gentamicin poisoning. Mr C complained that the decision to administer gentamicin was inappropriate, and that he was not told of the side effects or asked for his consent before the drug was administered.

We investigated Mr C's complaint and took independent advice from a consultant in general medicine. We did not uphold Mr C's complaints, as we found that gentamicin was the appropriate treatment for his symptoms and condition at the time. We also found that there was no requirement to explain the side effects or seek Mr C's consent before administering gentamicin, given that the side effects are extremely rare. However, we found that the board failed to monitor Mr C for signs of gentamicin poisoning, and failed to consider referral to an audiologist, as required by their guidance. Although we did not uphold his complaint, we made recommendations about this.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- apologise to Mr C for the failings our investigation found; and
- remind relevant staff of the gentamicin guidance in relation to monitoring for ototoxicity (ear poisoning) and considering audiology assessment where gentamicin is administered for more than seven days.