

SPSO decision report

Case: 201403450, A Medical Practice in the Tayside NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained on behalf of her client (Mrs A) who was unhappy with the care and treatment she received from her GP practice in relation to a finger injury.

After injuring her finger, Mrs A attended the hospital minor injuries and illnesses unit, but she was discharged. A week later, she attended the practice as she was still unable to bend her finger. The GP examined her finger and prescribed antibiotics. Mrs A returned a week later and a different GP prescribed different antibiotics. Mrs A returned again another week later, and at this appointment she mentioned that soon after the first injury, she had had a second injury which stretched her finger. The third GP then considered that Mrs A might have an injury to her flexor tendon (the tendon that connects the muscles in the forearm to the bones in the finger), and referred her to the orthopaedic clinic as a routine referral. After further investigations, Mrs A was diagnosed with an incomplete tear of the flexor tendon.

After taking independent medical advice from a GP adviser, we upheld the complaint. We found that, although the first two GPs did not know about the second injury, in view of Mrs A's symptoms they should still have considered the possibility of a flexor tendon injury and referred her for specialist assessment. Although the third GP acted appropriately in referring Mrs A to orthopaedics, this should have been an urgent referral, rather than routine. We were concerned that the GPs' failures to refer Mrs A appropriately led to a delay of over three weeks in her treatment, which our adviser said was significant as flexor tendon injuries are normally treated within a few days.

Recommendations

We recommended that the practice:

- issue a written apology to Mrs A for the failings our investigation found; and
- draw our findings to the attention of the GPs involved, for reflection as part of their annual appraisal.