

SPSO decision report

Case: 201404280, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: complaints handling
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained that the board required him to post a complaint to their patient relations team, rather than allowing him to submit a complaint to his prison health centre. Mr C felt this was unfair as he only had access to one second class stamp each week.

The board explained that in order to meet the national 20 working day target for dealing with complaints, they had asked prisoners to post their complaints directly to the patient relations team. In the board's view, this helped to remove any unnecessary delays in complaints being passed from the prison health centre to the patient relations team. The board also felt this approach was in line with the national complaints guidance 'Can I Help You' (CIHY).

We decided that the board's approach was not in line with CIHY, as the guidance does not specify to whom complaints should be made, only that the board must accept written or verbal complaints. This means complaints can be made to any member of board staff, including prison health centre staff. It is for the board to resolve any internal problems that might delay complaints being passed from the prison health centre to the patient relations team, and we would expect the board to deal with this without requiring prisoners to post a written complaint to the patient relations team. We upheld Mr C's complaint.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- apologise to Mr C for requiring him to post his complaint;
- reimburse Mr C for the cost of a second class stamp;
- revise their process so that prisoners can submit complaints to their prison health centre; and
- put in place internal arrangements to expedite the transfer of complaints from prison health centres to the patient relations team.