

SPSO decision report

Case: 201404381, Scottish Ambulance Service

Sector: health

Subject: appliances / equipment / premises

Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C complained that the Scottish Ambulance Service (the service) did not have the appropriate equipment or vehicle to take her late husband (Mr C) to hospital for a scan. Mr C was terminally ill with cancer and had widespread pain which severely restricted his mobility. Mrs C was also dissatisfied that the service did not apologise or explain why they delayed in replying to her complaint about the matter.

We took independent advice on this case from one of our nursing advisers. We noted that the service had reviewed the way the situation was managed and took appropriate action to prevent a similar situation recurring. We found that there was confusion about what equipment was required to take Mr C downstairs to the vehicle. Whilst the ambulance staff did their best with the equipment and vehicle that was available, there was a lack of communication as to the type of vehicle needed to transport him. As Mr C could not sit for long periods due to his condition, we considered it unreasonable to transport him to hospital in a chair which would have caused him additional pain and distress.

We also found that it took the service over three months to respond to Mrs C's complaint, which was well beyond the 20 working day timescale. Additionally, the service did not provide Mrs C with regular updates about the progress of their investigation or the reasons for the delay.

Recommendations

We recommended that the service:

- apologise to Mrs C for the failure to appropriately transfer her husband and for the distress that this caused; and
- apologise to Mrs C for the failings in the handling of her complaint.