

SPSO decision report

Case: 201406135, A Dentist in the Fife NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C had treatment to extract two teeth. Immediately after the treatment, he complained about the treatment received and that the dentist had failed to take reasonable account of his hearing condition. He complained that his dentist took too long to carry out the extractions and that he did not appear able to carry out the extractions. He also said that he had advised his dentist of his need to lip read in order to fully understand what was being said to him. However, during the procedure, the dentist had continued to speak to him with a mask on.

We took independent advice from our dental adviser, who said that the treatment Mr C received was reasonable and appropriate and that, while the extractions had taken some time, this was reasonable in this case. Our adviser explained that guidance issued by Health Protection Scotland requires dentists to wear full personal protection equipment (PPE), including a mask, during any operative procedure. As such, he considered that it would not have been reasonable to expect the dentist to repeatedly stop the procedure and remove his mask to speak to the patient. This would have required the dentist to remove his PPE, undertake hand hygiene and put on new PPE on each occasion that he stopped to speak to the patient. However, we were mindful of Fife NHS Board's advice that requires staff to respect disabilities. We considered that, in the circumstances, consideration should have been given to offering Mr C the services of an advocate/translator/interpreter or similar. This would have ensured that he fully understood what was being said to him during the procedure.

Recommendations

We recommended that the dentist:

- reflect on this case to guide future practice to ensure that a patient's communication needs are being met. In particular, that in a similar situation consideration should be given to offering a patient the services of an advocate/translator/interpreter or similar who could speak to the patient without wearing a mask.