

SPSO decision report

Case: 201507814, Highland NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C has suffered from spondylolisthesis (where a bone in the spine slips out of position, either forwards or backwards) for a number of years. After his lower back pain became worse his GP referred him for physiotherapy. Mr C attended an appointment with a physiotherapist and was told to self-manage his condition by undertaking core stability exercises and maintaining posture awareness. Mr C had previously found massage therapy to be beneficial to him and he was unhappy that this treatment was not offered to him despite his requests. Mr C had previously obtained massage therapy privately but no longer had the resources to do so.

Mr C wrote to the board to complain that the exercises recommended by the physiotherapist were not helping his condition. Mr C stated that he had obtained private treatment (for massage therapy) on occasion, and that he believed that this treatment should be offered by the NHS. The board investigated Mr C's complaint and concluded that whilst massage therapy can help lower back pain for short periods of time, the exercise programme recommended to Mr C was the most appropriate for managing his condition.

After taking independent medical advice from a musculoskeletal out-patient physiotherapist, we did not uphold Mr C's complaint. The adviser concluded that it was reasonable of the board to refuse Mr C massage therapy as there was limited evidence to support the effectiveness of the treatment in managing chronic lower back pain. The adviser also thought that the exercise programme treatment that was recommended to Mr C was reasonable. In view of this, there was no evidence that the board had unreasonably refused to offer Mr C massage therapy and we did not uphold the complaint.