

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201508086, Highland NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** appointments / admissions (delay / cancellation / waiting lists)  
**Outcome:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C complained that when the board decided to change follow-up appointments for some cancer patients from face-to-face appointments to phone appointments, the decision was notified to her in an inappropriate way, that the decision was unreasonable and that there was an unreasonable delay in providing a copy of the discharge letter sent to her GP.

Mrs C received treatment for cancer which was thought to be of low risk of recurrence. She was told she would be followed up for a period of three years at six-monthly clinic appointments. However, before the sixth appointment she was sent a letter informing her that the appointment had been changed to a phone appointment. The letter was undated, on plain notepaper and had no signature or indication of the author.

Our investigation found that the decision to move to phone appointments was reasonable and in line with guidance from the Department of Health. However, the manner in which Mrs C had been notified of this change was unacceptable. The board explained that the consultant in charge of Mrs C's care had drafted a letter to inform patients of the change. It was then circulated to the multi-disciplinary team for review and once approved was sent to Mrs C without being transferred to headed notepaper and having the date, the name of the consultant and their signature added. Since Mrs C's complaint the letter had been amended.

Mrs C did not receive a copy of the GP letter until several weeks after her phone appointment. We considered this and other administrative failures which occurred during the complaints process to be unacceptable.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- issue a written apology for the failings identified during this investigation; and
- review the way complaints correspondence is dealt with to ensure that relevant enclosures are provided and standard letter templates are amended to reflect the situation with the complainant at that time.