

SPSO decision report

Case: 201508194, A Medical Practice in the Forth Valley NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C, who works for an advice and support agency, complained about the care and treatment of his clients' late daughter (Miss A). Miss A attended the practice on a number of occasions from May 2014 with symptoms including a persistent cough, sore joints, fatigue and weight loss. A number of possible diagnoses were considered and investigated but Miss A's symptoms persisted. In October 2014 following an out-of-hours attendance, Miss A was admitted to hospital and diagnosed with endocarditis (a rare and potentially fatal infection of the inner lining of the heart). Miss A passed away in hospital a few weeks later. Her parents raised concern that a window of opportunity had been missed to diagnose Miss A. They felt that there was a delay in the practice arranging appropriate investigations and referrals.

The practice met with Miss A's parents and carried out a significant event analysis. The practice considered the care provided was reasonable, although they identified some learning points for improvement including improving continuity of care and having a lower threshold for investigatory blood tests in young people with persistent symptoms.

After taking independent medical advice we did not uphold Mr C's complaint. We found the practice had arranged appropriate investigations in view of Miss A's symptoms, including seeking advice from Miss A's former specialist to check for any connection between her symptoms and another ongoing condition and making referrals to hospital specialists. The adviser explained that Miss A's symptoms varied over this time and appeared more in keeping with a respiratory problem (which the GPs appropriately investigated). The adviser considered symptoms indicating a possible problem with the heart were first documented at the out-of-hours admission in October 2014, so it was not a failing that the practice did not investigate this possibility earlier.