

SPSO decision report

Case: 201508477, Scottish Ambulance Service

Sector: health

Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis

Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Miss C complained about the care and treatment provided to her late father (Mr A). Mr A became unwell and an ambulance was called. The ambulance crew examined him and suspected a heart attack. They contacted the coronary care unit at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh and it was agreed that Mr A should be brought there. However, Mr A went into cardiac arrest on the way and, despite the ambulance diverting to the nearest hospital at that time, he could not be resuscitated and he died. Miss C complained about the time taken for the ambulance to set off for hospital and also about the decision to take Mr A to Edinburgh rather than his local hospital.

The ambulance service noted that the ambulance was present at Mr A's home for a total of 33 minutes. They advised that this included all the patient assessment process, liaison with the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, and transferring Mr A to the ambulance. They indicated that the only issue that may have created a slight delay was difficulty in establishing intravenous access (where a thin tube is placed inside a vein to administer or withdraw fluids).

We took independent clinical advice from a paramedic. They considered that the ambulance crew had provided appropriate clinical treatment and acted within Mr A's best interests. While they noted that the ambulance was at Mr A's home for 13 minutes more than the optimum recommended time for a coronary case, they considered that the delay was not unreasonable in the circumstances. They advised that it was the correct decision to transfer Mr A to Edinburgh for specialist treatment, right up to the point that he went into cardiac arrest. They informed us that it was accepted practice to bypass nearer hospitals to take patients to the best possible place of treatment and they said it was not certain that Mr A would have survived the cardiac arrest had he been in hospital when it occurred. We accepted this advice and did not uphold the complaint.