

SPSO decision report

Case: 201703342, Scottish Ambulance Service
Sector: health
Subject: failure to send ambulance / delay in sending ambulance
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr and Mrs C complained that the ambulance service delayed in sending an ambulance after Mr C suffered multiple fractures in an accident at his home. They also complained that there was a further delay in sending an ambulance when his local hospital asked the ambulance service to transfer him to a major trauma centre. Mr C subsequently developed fat embolism syndrome (a life-threatening condition where fat particles within the bone are released into the bloodstream) and went into a coma. He considers that this was at least partly due to the ambulance service's delay in sending ambulances to both his home and his local hospital.

We took independent advice from a paramedic. We found that a dispatcher in the ambulance control centre had failed to identify a paramedic crewed ambulance that was available at the time of Mr C's 999 call. This had caused an unreasonable delay by the ambulance service in sending an ambulance to Mr C's home. In view of this, we upheld this aspect of Mr and Mrs C's complaint, although we acknowledged that the ambulance service had already apologised for this and had taken some action to try to prevent this happening again.

We found that the delay by the ambulance service in sending an ambulance to transfer Mr C from his local hospital to a major trauma centre had not been unreasonable. Mr C was in a place of safety and could have been upgraded to an emergency by the hospital at any time. We did not uphold this aspect of Mr and Mrs C's complaint. However, we considered that the communication between the ambulance service and clinicians in the hospital could have been better and we provided some feedback to the ambulance service in relation to this. We also provided some feedback to the ambulance service on trauma care and the documentation of this.

Recommendations

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- Dispatchers should be able to identify available resources and, where appropriate, ensure that these are dispatched promptly.