

SPSO decision report

Case: 201705035, Scottish Ambulance Service
Sector: health
Subject: failure to send ambulance / delay in sending ambulance
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained on behalf of his wife (Mrs A) that the ambulance service unreasonably failed to dispatch an ambulance following an emergency call and that they did not handle his complaint reasonably.

Mrs A had been diagnosed with a tumour at the rear of her brain and was waiting for an operation. Mr C said that Mrs A was told to call the emergency services if she experienced certain symptoms. When Mrs A subsequently experienced these symptoms, Mr C called the emergency services and spoke to a call handler who referred Mrs A to NHS 24. Mr C was unhappy that the ambulance service failed to dispatch an ambulance following the emergency call.

We took independent advice from a consultant in emergency medicine. We found that the information reported during the emergency call did not confirm that Mrs A had an immediately life-threatening condition, which would have required the dispatch of an ambulance as an emergency. The adviser noted that the decision to refer the call to NHS 24 in order to get a more detailed assessment of the situation by a clinically trained person was reasonable. We found that the decisions taken by the ambulance service were reasonable and therefore, we did not uphold this aspect of Mr C's complaint.

In relation to complaints handling, we found that the ambulance service had performed a detailed audit of the emergency call and that the member of staff involved had appropriately reflected on the call. We were satisfied that the complaint investigation carried out was reasonable and that the response to Mr C addressed the points he had raised. We did not uphold this aspect of Mr C's complaint.