

SPSO decision report

Case: 201707109, Lanarkshire NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: admission / discharge / transfer procedures
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mrs C, an advocacy and support worker, complained on behalf of her client (Ms B) about the care and treatment her elderly mother (Mrs A) received at Wishaw General Hospital and Kello Hospital. Mrs A had been in hospital after being diagnosed with lung cancer. Due to her frail condition, Mrs A was unsuitable for further care and could only be made comfortable. She was discharged home. Mrs A's condition deteriorated further and she was admitted to hospital for pain relief and palliative care. Mrs C complained that Mrs A was not fit for discharge and there was insufficient discussion with the family about this or about the medication Mrs A required to take at home. Mrs C also complained that the support provided by a nurse was unreasonable and on admission to Kello Hospital, staff failed to communicate reasonably with Mrs A family and delayed in providing appropriate pain relief.

We took independent advice from a doctor and from a specialist registered nurse. We found that discharge planning for someone with a terminal illness was complicated and difficult. While it was acknowledged that Mrs A wanted to go home, the arrangements made for her discharge had been hasty with insufficient discussion with the family who were unprepared for the demands of looking after her; they had no clear understanding of the medication prescribed and needed by her. Therefore, we upheld these aspects of Mrs C's complaints.

In relation to the nursing care, we found the support to be reasonable. We also considered the communication from staff at Kello Hospital to be appropriate and found no concerns with the pain relief given to Mrs A. Therefore, we did not uphold these aspects of Mrs C's complaints.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to Ms B for failing to fully discuss with her the advanced nature of Mrs A's illness and discharge medication. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/leaflets-and-guidance.

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

- Patients and their family/carers should receive appropriate information on discharge arrangements and, where appropriate, have an adequate understanding of the nature and seriousness of the condition. Conversations about this should be recorded.
- Patients should receive the medication prescribed and this should be documented.