SPSO decision report

Case: **201800066, Highland NHS Board**
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C complained about a delay in the board diagnosing hereditary haemochromatosis (a medical condition caused by an overload of iron in the body). Mr C experienced various symptoms that he said increased in number and severity over six years until his diagnosis. Mr C raised concerns that the doctors should have investigated further rather than repeating the same tests, and that they missed a condition that would have been easily diagnosed by a simple blood test.

We took independent advice from a consultant in general medicine with a clinical interest in haemochromatosis. We noted that it is quite rare and diagnosis can be delayed in many cases for over five years. Mr C was seen by different clinicians in various different specialities before the diagnosis emerged following a random blood test for ferritin (iron storage protein). There was no family history of the condition and we considered that the symptoms Mr C experienced prior to the diagnosis were non-specific rather than being classical symptoms of haemochromatosis. We also considered that a blood test done a year before the diagnosis would not prompt consideration of hereditary haemochromatosis as a likely explanation. We concluded that staff did not unreasonably delay in considering the diagnosis at an earlier stage. We did not uphold Mr C's complaint.