

SPSO decision report

Case: 201802900, Lothian NHS Board - Acute Division
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Miss C complained about the care and treatment she received at the Western General Hospital. Miss C had a history of breast cancer and at a routine examination a member of staff noticed some discolouration of the skin around the breast. Miss C was told by staff that they felt she may have dermatitis (a skin condition) and an urgent referral was made to the dermatology department (the branch of medicine concerned with the diagnosis and treatment of skin disorders). Miss C was subsequently told that she had angiosarcoma (cancer of the inner lining of blood vessels, commonly found in the skin, breast, liver, spleen and deep tissue). Miss C felt that it was unreasonable that staff had thought she had dermatitis and by referring her to dermatology there was a delay in the treatment of her returning breast cancer.

We took independent advice from a medical adviser. We found that Miss C's original breast cancer had not returned and that she had developed a rare but recognised complication of breast cancer treatment, angiosarcoma. In its early stages, this can often look like dermatitis or bruising. We found that staff acted appropriately by arranging an urgent dermatology review with investigations which resulted in the correct diagnosis. There was no evidence of any undue delay in the diagnosis. Therefore, we did not uphold Miss C's complaint.