

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201804332, Grampian NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Decision:** not upheld, no recommendations

### Summary

Mr C complained that the care and treatment given to his late wife (Mrs A) by the board was unreasonable. Mrs A had a history of rheumatoid arthritis (an inflammatory disorder that mainly affects flexible joints) and was later investigated for possible heart disease. The investigations proved negative. However, a year later she was admitted to hospital again and found to have severe problems with the functioning of her heart valves. Heart surgery was considered, but Mrs A developed sepsis and multiple organ failure which increased the risks associated with surgery. However, it was considered that Mrs A would not survive without an operation, which went ahead. After Mrs A was discharged home, she picked up a serious infection and suffered a stroke. She died a few months later.

We took independent advice from a cardiologist (a doctor who specialises in the heart and blood vessels). We found that it was extremely unusual for a patient's heart condition to deteriorate so rapidly and that this could not have been foreseen; there had been no delay in treating Mrs A's symptoms or in diagnosing her heart problems. Mrs A's health was such that surgery was always going to be risky for her, but there had been no delay undertaking it. Afterwards, the serious infection from which Mrs A suffered had a significant associated mortality rate and her health continued to deteriorate despite her treatment. Therefore, we did not uphold the complaint.