

SPSO decision report



Case: 201809363, Scottish Ambulance Service
Sector: Health
Subject: failure to send ambulance / delay in sending ambulance
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

A GP practice contacted the Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) to request that C's grandchild (A) be transferred from a local hospital to a hospital with a paediatric unit after A became unwell with suspected meningitis. The practice prioritised the request as urgent, therefore requiring a response within an hour. SAS contacted the practice to request approval for a delay in responding to the request. The practice agreed to the extension based on the information provided by SAS.

C complained that the time taken for A to be transferred to the main hospital was unreasonable for A's suspected ailment. C considered that an air ambulance should have been sent to transfer A to the main hospital.

We took independent advice from a consultant paramedic. We found that the SAS failed to provide the practice with accurate clinical information about A on which the practice could base their decision to agree or refuse the extension to the transfer time. As SAS failed to obtain confirmation from the local hospital that A's condition was unchanged, and therefore the practice's decision to agree to the delay was based on incomplete information, we upheld this aspect of the complaint.

C also complained that SAS's response to their complaint was unreasonable. We found that the investigation of the complaint did not identify SAS's failure to provide accurate information regarding A's condition to the practice. As a consequence, the complaint response failed to provide an accurate account of how the decision was made to delay the transfer. For this reason we upheld this aspect of the complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C, and A's mother, for SAS staff failing to share accurate clinical information on A's clinical condition with the GP.
- Apologise to C for failing to provide a reasonable response to their complaint. The apologies should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

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

- SAS staff should provide accurate clinical information on a patient's clinical condition with relevant healthcare professionals.
- SAS staff should seek relevant information where necessary from the healthcare professionals in direct care of a patient.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- SAS should provide accurate responses to complaints.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.