

SPSO decision report

Case: 201902073, Dumfries and Galloway NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

C brought a complaint to us about the care and treatment given to their late parent (A) at Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary. C complained that there was a lack of communication between staff and the family throughout A's treatment. In particular, they said that the severity of A's illness was not explained to A or the family. C stated that the family remained unclear about the specifics of the cancer A had, that there had been no reaction to A's early symptoms and that A was advised about their diagnosis by phone with no offer of support provided. C also complained that the administration of A's medication was unreasonable; in particular, that there was inadequate pain control and that no one took overall control of A's care and treatment. During the board's own investigation of the complaint, they accepted that A should not have been advised of their diagnosis by phone, and an apology had been given for that. The board had also indicated this was an area for reflection and learning.

We took independent advice from a consultant hepatologist and gastroenterologist (a doctor who cares for patients with benign or malignant disorders of the gastrointestinal tract, liver, pancreas and gallbladder). We found that while there was some learning for the board in relation to aspects of communication, the overall care and treatment given to A was reasonable. While we did not uphold the complaint, we asked the board to provide evidence of the action taken to ensure alternative methods of communicating a diagnosis to a patient had been considered.