

SPSO decision report



Case: 201905144, A Medical Practice in the Lanarkshire NHS Board area
Sector: Health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

The complainants (B & C) raised concerns about the practice following the suicide of their child (A). A and B had attended the practice two weeks prior to A's death and B & C told us that they held concerns regarding the manner of the GP they saw, which A and B had found to be dismissive and unsupportive. While they did not consider that the doctor could have predicted the extent of A's distress, they considered that the doctor's demeanour may have contributed towards A feeling unsupported.

B & C also held concerns regarding the way in which the practice had cared for them following A's death, as they had concerns about a prescription for Diazepam (a drug which belongs to a group of medicines called benzodiazepines and usually used to treat anxiety) they both received, the lack of other support offered, and the way in which the practice carried out a Significant Adverse Event Review (SAER) into what had occurred.

On investigation, we found that the doctor in question had already accepted that their body language had been inappropriate and apologised for this, when responding to B & C's original complaint. We took independent advice from a GP on the care and treatment offered and we considered that the support provided by the doctor at the appointment was otherwise reasonable. Therefore, we did not uphold that element of the complaint.

We considered that the handling of the prescription of Diazepam and the bereavement support otherwise offered to B & C had been inappropriate. We also found that the SAER had been unreasonably delayed. Therefore, we upheld these complaints.

Recommendations

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

- Patients should be appropriately consulted before being prescribed benzodiazepines; patients should not be prescribed benzodiazepines for longer than is appropriate; the practice should consider whether prescribing benzodiazepines is appropriate for grieving families, given this may impair their grief reaction; and grieving families should be contacted with offers of support.
- Significant Event Analysis Reviews should be completed in a timely manner and identify any failings in treatment, as appropriate.

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.