

SPSO decision report

Case: 201905455, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about a psychiatric consultation at Falkirk Community Hospital. They complained that they did not receive adequate support from the psychiatrist and that the psychiatrist made inappropriate comments regarding the impact of suicide on others and the best way to complete suicide. We took independent advice from a consultant psychiatrist. It was not possible to confirm from the notes the way the psychiatrist communicated with C or exactly what was discussed surrounding suicide. The board explained that it was the psychiatrist's normal practice to discuss the impact of suicide on others but refuted that C was advised of the best way to take their own life. We considered that the psychiatrist carried out a reasonable assessment and proposed an appropriate management plan. We did not uphold this complaint.

C also complained that a board run GP practice refused to continue their prescription for gabapentin (an anticonvulsant medication primarily used to treat partial seizures and neuropathic pain) until C had been seen by the psychiatrist. This medication had been prescribed overseas and C noted that it was for restless leg syndrome (RLS) and not a psychological condition. The board explained that gabapentin is a controlled drug in the UK which can only be prescribed in specific circumstances and with specialist input. They noted it is unlicensed for RLS. We took independent advice from a GP, who noted that gabapentin can be prescribed 'off-label' to treat RLS and they saw no reason for changing this if C had been taking it with good effect and was established on a reasonable dose. However, if the practice had concerns and wished to change this, it should have been gradually reduced and not stopped suddenly. We concluded that it was unreasonable to have refused to prescribe C gabapentin pending a psychiatric review. We upheld this complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for the stoppage of their gabapentin without a reduction regime. The apology 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:

- The board should ensure the practice GPs familiarise themselves with gabapentin reduction regimes and the indications for the same.

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.