

SPSO decision report



Case: 202202721, A Medical Practice in the Grampian NHS Board area
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

C, an MSP, complained on behalf of their constituent (B) about the standard of care B's late spouse (A) received from their GP practice. A attended an appointment with a GP and received antibiotics and steroids for a possible chest infection. A's health deteriorated a short time later and they suffered a cardiac arrest at their home. B complained that the practice failed to recognise that A was suffering from a serious cardiac condition.

The practice said that a full examination and history had been taken from A. The GP concluded that the symptoms were from the chest wall rather than originating from the heart, with a suggestion of chest infection and narrowing of the airways. A received steroids and an antibiotic in treatment of a chest infection, and given advice on what to do if their condition worsened. On learning of A's death, a Significant Event Analysis was carried out by the GP, which identified learning points in relation to arranging ECGs (a test that records the electrical activity of the heart, including the rate and rhythm), and strengthening the advice given to a patient about phoning again should their condition worsen.

We took independent advice from a GP. We found that it was reasonable for the GP to treat A on suspicion of a respiratory infection having taken a history and clinical examination. While A's oxygen saturation levels were low, this can also be found in cases of acute or chronic lung disease, such as infection. A also displayed symptoms that were not typical of classic heart attack pain. We found that A's blood pressure and heart rate were both normal which did not suggest a heart attack. We considered that the GP made a careful assessment and reached a reasonable working diagnosis at the time based on the information available and their clinical judgement. Therefore, we did not uphold C's complaint.