

SPSO decision report



Case: 202203142, Highland NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

C complained about the care and treatment provided to their late spouse (A). A was admitted to hospital with a suspected small bowel incarcerated in the hernia (a part of the intestine that becomes trapped in the sac of a hernia). Following a CT scan and assessment by a surgeon, it was decided to treat A's condition conservatively and transfer them to a larger hospital in the area. However, there was a delay in the transfer taking place due to a lack of ambulance resource and A's condition deteriorated further during their admission. A died shortly after admission. C complained about the delay in transferring A to another hospital or operating on them sooner. In C's view, A did not receive a reasonable standard of treatment or end of life care following their admission to hospital. In addition to this, C complained about the board's communication with the family during A's time in hospital.

We took independent advice from an emergency medicine consultant and a general and colorectal surgeon (specialist in conditions of the colon, rectum or anus). We found that the treatment provided by the board was reasonable. In light of A's presentation, and without the benefit of hindsight, it was reasonable to treat A conservatively and arrange for a transfer to a better resourced centre. We also found that the end-of-life care provided to A was reasonable, given A's rapid deterioration and the circumstances within the hospital at that time. Therefore, we did not uphold this part of C's complaint.

In relation to the standard of communication with the family, taking into account A's rapid deterioration and the circumstances within the hospital at the time, we concluded that communication was reasonable. Therefore, we did not uphold this part of C's complaint.