

SPSO decision report



Case: 202304354, A medical practice in the Highland NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about the practice's treatment and diagnosis in respect of issues C had with their leg over a period of 18 months and being diagnosed with deep vein thrombosis (DVT). In C's view, the practice missed various opportunities to diagnose DVT or refer onwards to an appropriate specialist. C also raised concerns about the general treatment that they received from when they presented with a lesion on their left leg. The practice had acknowledged that there was a delay in diagnosing C's DVT. However, there remained uncertainty regarding when the practice should have diagnosed a DVT or explored the possibility of this diagnosis.

We took advice from an independent GP adviser. In respect of the DVT, we found that this was a more difficult case of DVT to diagnose. However, there were signs that the practice unreasonably missed. C attended a consultation after they had been on a flight. We found that, from this point onwards, there was an unreasonable failure to fully take into account risk factors and symptoms pointing to an alternative diagnosis of DVT. There were also missed opportunities to carry out appropriate investigations that would have supported or ruled out such a diagnosis. We considered that there was less certainty over whether the DVT was present prior to C's flight. We upheld this complaint.

In respect of the more general care of C's leg, we found that this was initially of a good standard. However, this became less reasonable as the months went on and C's symptoms persisted. We found that, at a certain point, the practice were not treating C's symptoms proactively. We also considered an apparent absence of a dermatology referral, despite C's records indicating that this was part of the treatment plan. For these reasons, we upheld this complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for failing to diagnose or explore the possibility of DVT, for failing to treat C's leg issues pro-actively after a period of time and for not following through on a referral to dermatology. 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:

- DVT should be explored as a possible diagnosis when relevant symptoms and risk factors are present, even when another diagnosis is considered more likely. Treatment for potential DVT should be provided in line with SIGN, NICE or other relevant guidance unless there is a specific reason not to do this. If a decision is taken not to follow relevant guidance, then the reason for this should be recorded.

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.