

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 202306996, Highland NHS Board  
**Sector:** Health  
**Subject:** Admission / discharge / transfer procedures  
**Decision:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C complained that the board did not take reasonable action regarding their referrals. C was privately assessed by specialists in England, who recommended hospital admission for tests. C informed Highland NHS Board and it took over 18 months to approve and arrange referrals.

We found that there was an unreasonable delay in progressing C's respiratory referral and that the board's communication was inadequate. The board failed to provide reasonable updates, which might have revealed sooner that the hospital C had been referred to had not received their original submission of the referral. Given this, we upheld the complaint.

We found that the board unreasonably delayed C's neurology referral. The board's said that the delay was due to uncertainty over a consultant's approval for MRI imaging and whether C wished to remain a private patient. We found that C had advised that they would request private care be paused pending the board's multi-disciplinary team discussions. While the decision to refer C to another NHS Board was reasonable, taking six months to action this was not. We upheld the complaint.

Finally, we found that communication with C was inadequate. Given this, we upheld this complaint and note the steps that the board have taken to address this.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C that their communications were inaccurate. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [www.spsso.org.uk/meaningful-apologies](http://www.spsso.org.uk/meaningful-apologies).
- Apologise to C that they did not take reasonable action regarding the neurology referral. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [www.spsso.org.uk/meaningful-apologies](http://www.spsso.org.uk/meaningful-apologies).
- Apologise to C that they did not take reasonable action regarding the respiratory referral and that they did not keep C reasonably updated regarding the progress of the referral. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [www.spsso.org.uk/meaningful-apologies](http://www.spsso.org.uk/meaningful-apologies).

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

- Communication with patients whilst referrals are being discussed, or pending a response, is proactive, open, honest, and regular.

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.