

SPSO decision report



Case: 202309539, A Medical Practice in the Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board area

Sector: Health

Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis

Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about the standard of medical care and treatment provided by the practice and about the way that they handled C's complaint. C attended the practice with symptoms of rectal bleeding, a change in bowel habit and abdominal pain. The practice made a routine referral to hospital but did not carry out a rectal examination. C was later diagnosed with bowel cancer. C felt that there was an unreasonable delay in diagnosing and treating their cancer.

We took independent advice from a GP. We found that C's referral to hospital should have been marked as urgent given their symptoms and a rectal examination undertaken. We also found that information about C's family history was not recorded correctly. Therefore, we upheld this part of C's complaint. However, we noted that it was unlikely that these failings would have had any impact on the treatment options or outcome for C.

C also complained that the practice failed to handle their complaint reasonably. We found that the practice failed to reflect on the failings in their response to C. We upheld this part of C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for the failings identified in this investigation in relation to the standard of medical care and complaint handling. 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:

- Clinical staff should be aware of the relevant guidelines for urgent suspicion of cancer and standard practice to ensure all patients with similar symptoms are provided with a reasonable standard of medical care.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Relevant staff should ensure that failings are reflected on and that the complaint investigation and response are focused on the complainant.

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.