

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201102499, Lothian NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** appointments/admissions (delay, cancellation, waiting lists)  
**Outcome:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C had worsening hearing loss in both ears, with narrow ear canals that made use of in-ear hearing aids painful and intolerable. She complained that the board failed to refer her to the correct consultant at the right time, and that there was an unreasonable delay of a year in being sent to see the correct consultant. Mrs C also complained that she was not referred to a bone anchored hearing aid (BAHA) clinic when she first attended for investigations, and she questioned whether this clinic existed at all. BAHAs conduct sound to the inner ear directly through the bone, rather than through the air, which is how Mrs C's current in-ear hearing aids operate. In addition, Mrs C complained that the audiology clinic had no appropriate BAHA headband trial equipment available for nearly seven months.

We were critical of the board's lack of clarity in communicating with Mrs C about the availability of BAHA headbands, and we drew this to their attention. However, it is not for us to say how the board should use their resources, and it was clear that the lack of availability of BAHA trial headbands was a resource issue that the board had tried to remedy by ordering additional units. Therefore, we did not uphold this complaint.

When we looked into Mrs C's other complaints, we found that the BAHA clinic did exist. The board accepted there were difficulties and delays in progressing Mrs C's care and they apologised to her. Our adviser noted that a key referral should have been more clearly documented, and that Mrs C should have been considered for other hearing aid technologies more quickly, given that she was unable to use air conduction devices. We concluded that Mrs C did not see appropriate staff in reasonable time and, in particular, that she should have been considered sooner for referral to the BAHA clinic, and we upheld these complaints.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- review pathways from Audiology to ENT (medicine of the ear, nose and throat), so that patients who do not benefit from air conduction hearing aids can be considered for other technologies in reasonable time.