

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201301821, Grampian NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mr C was diagnosed with alopecia (hair loss) as a child. It became progressively worse and he now suffers from alopecia universalis (a condition where a patient has no body hair). Mr C's GP referred him to Aberdeen Royal Infirmary where he saw a consultant dermatologist. Mr C complained about the care and treatment he was given which he believed was neither reasonable nor appropriate. He said that he had been forced to take medication that was ineffective and possibly had long-term side effects. He questioned his treatment plan and said that he had not been properly reviewed. Mr C was unhappy that he had not been prescribed an experimental treatment and said that the board did not provide him with appropriate support.

We took independent medical advice on the complaint from a dermatology specialist. Our adviser said that alopecia universalis has a very poor prognosis and that there is little or nothing that is effective in its treatment. The treatment given to Mr C was reasonable and appropriate and in accordance with his symptoms but, given the devastating consequences of this condition, we upheld his complaints as our adviser said that the board did not go as far as could have been reasonably expected to treat him. They did not seek support from neighbouring health board services or try to establish whether there were medical trials that might assist him. Their follow-up was poor, as a consequence of which he was effectively discharged and lost his wig entitlement, and had to visit his GP again for a further referral. Our adviser said that the board were, however, correct to refuse him the unlicensed treatment that he sought.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- make a formal apology for their oversights in this matter;
- bring our findings to the consultant dermatologist's attention for him to reflect upon;
- make a formal apology in recognition of these failures; and
- emphasise to staff the importance of responding to complaints in a full and timely manner.