

SPSO decision report

Case: 201303126, Scottish Ambulance Service
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

Mr C, who is a doctor, complained on behalf of his friend (Mr A). Mr A had phoned Mr C because he had pain in his chest and arm. Mr C was concerned that his friend was having a heart attack, so he phoned for an ambulance. The crew assessed Mr A, including carrying out an electrocardiograph (ECG - a test that records the electrical activity of the heart). They found no indicators of a heart attack, and Mr A decided not to go to hospital. When Mr C heard this, he was very concerned and phoned for another ambulance. At this point his call was transferred to NHS 24, who went on to speak to Mr A before sending another ambulance. Mr A was taken to hospital and was found to have had a heart attack. Mr C then complained that the first crew did not assess Mr A properly and take him to hospital.

The Scottish Ambulance Service said that Mr A had not been taken to hospital in the first ambulance at his own request. However, they also noted that the crew did not make sufficiently thorough records of the tests they carried out and their visit.

We sought independent advice from a paramedic, who said that the first call was taken and prioritised appropriately, and that the service appropriately sent an emergency ambulance. He also considered that, given the finding of the tests when they assessed Mr A, it was reasonable for the crew's assessment to override Mr C's phone assessment. Mr C's second phone call was also appropriately handled, given the evidence available. We did not uphold the complaint, as although we found that the first crew were not told that a doctor had assessed Mr A by phone, and did not keep sufficient records of their interaction with Mr A, we were satisfied that they appropriately assessed his condition. We also noted that the service had reminded ambulance crews that they should make sure they evidence all of their clinical actions, particularly where a patient is not being taken to hospital.