

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201305956, Grampian NHS Board  
**Sector:** health  
**Subject:** clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Outcome:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

Mrs C, who is an advice worker, complained on behalf of her client (Mrs A), who experienced a sudden and severe headache while on holiday visiting her daughter. Mrs A's daughter arranged for an ambulance to take Mrs A, who has a history of migraines, to A&E at Dr Gray's Hospital.

A junior doctor reviewed Mrs A and referred her to a senior doctor to determine whether a CT scan (a scan that uses a computer to produce an image of the body) would be necessary. The senior doctor reviewed Mrs A a few hours later, decided this was not required and discharged her, advising her to seek help if her condition worsened or did not improve. Mrs A said the doctor told her that it would be safe for her to fly home the next day, but the doctor did not recall saying this. Mrs A flew home the next day and arrived feeling very ill. A few days later she was admitted to hospital where, after further investigations, she was diagnosed with a brain aneurysm (a bulge in a blood vessel in the brain).

Mrs C complained about the care and treatment Mrs A received at A&E. She said that Mrs A was misdiagnosed and her symptoms were not taken seriously due to her history of migraines. She also complained that the doctor inappropriately advised Mrs A that it was safe to fly.

After taking independent advice on this complaint from a medical adviser, we upheld Mrs C's complaint. We found that the senior doctor had failed to properly investigate Mrs A's symptoms in line with relevant guidance and so missed the diagnosis of a brain aneurysm. In relation to whether the doctor had advised Mrs A that it was safe to fly, there was no evidence of this in the medical records and so we could not make any finding.

### Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- issue a written apology to Mrs A, acknowledging the failings our investigation identified; and
- raise the failings we found with the doctor involved for reflection and learning as part of their annual performance review.