

SPSO decision report

Case: 201401361, Fife NHS Board
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

Mr C is elderly and has dementia. His wife (Mrs C) complained to us about failings in her husband's nursing care during a stay at Cameron House Hospital. These included delays in taking Mr C to the toilet, delay in receiving medication for constipation; lack of stimulation; failure to supervise Mr C, which led to him falling several times; and poor nutrition, which caused him to lose weight. Mrs C said that her husband had suffered a urine infection and that nursing staff did not ask a doctor to test him for this and that he contracted MRSA (a bacterial infection resistant to a number of widely used antibiotics). She was unhappy with the attitude of nursing staff, both towards her and Mr C, and said that they failed to communicate with her about Mr C's care.

We took independent advice from a nursing adviser who said, after considering Mr C's medical records, that his care was reasonable. However, the adviser said that it was clear that staff failed to appropriately communicate with Mrs C about her husband's care and treatment. In addition, there was a failure to ensure Mrs C's views were listened to and acted on. The board had accepted there were some failings in how members of staff communicated with Mrs C, and in record-keeping. They had apologised to Mrs C and put an action plan into place to deal with this.

We took the view that this failure in communication understandably led to a breakdown in the relationship between Mrs C and nursing staff, causing Mrs C to lose confidence in the staff caring for her husband. We accepted that Mrs C had a genuine belief that there was a failure to meet Mr C's care needs. In addition, we also found that there was a lack of support and reassurance from nursing staff to help Mrs C cope with the distressing and worsening nature of Mr C's dementia. We were critical of the apparent lack of empathy by staff, given that caring for relatives is a key part of the healthcare professionals' role. We upheld Mrs C's complaint and made two recommendations for further action.

Recommendations

We recommended that the board:

- apologise to Mrs C for the failings identified; and
- provide a copy of the action plan and an updated report on the implementation of the plan.