

SPSO decision report

Case: 201500896, A Medical Practice in the Grampian NHS Board area
Sector: health
Subject: clinical treatment / diagnosis
Outcome: upheld, recommendations

Summary

About six weeks after the birth of her child, Mrs C attended her GP practice with bleeding and abdominal pain. She was treated with antibiotics. She was reviewed several times over the next few months, and a urine test and vaginal swab were carried out, with further antibiotics prescribed. Mrs C was then referred to gynaecology as a private patient, and subsequent investigations showed there were retained products of conception (pieces of placenta) left after the birth. Mrs C complained about the delay in referring her, and said she was only referred after telling the GPs she had private medical insurance.

The practice explained that the cause of Mrs C's bleeding had been unclear. Mrs C had had a CT scan (a scan which uses x-rays and a computer to create detailed images of the inside of the body) after the birth which had returned a normal result (suggesting there were no retained products of conception). In relation to the delay, the practice noted that on one occasion the GP asked Mrs C to come back in one to two weeks, but Mrs C did not return until six weeks later. Mrs C said this was the first available appointment, but the practice said there were a number of earlier appointments available with the same or different GPs. The practice gave us a copy of their audit records, which showed the appointment was booked only a few days before the date of the appointment.

After taking independent medical advice from a GP, we upheld Mrs C's complaint. The adviser said that the GPs should have arranged an ultrasound in view of Mrs C's symptoms of unexplained bleeding for six weeks after birth, and they should have referred Mrs C to gynaecology earlier. However, we agreed that part of the delay was caused by Mrs C returning in six weeks, rather than two (which may have been due to a misunderstanding or miscommunication).

Recommendations

We recommended that the GPs concerned:

- apologise to Mrs C for the failings our investigation found;
- familiarise themselves with postpartum complications and consider identifying this as a learning aim; and
- reflect on our findings as part of their next annual appraisals.