

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 201808119, Fife NHS Board  
**Sector:** Health  
**Subject:** clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Decision:** some upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C complained about the care and treatment provided to their late relative (A). A was admitted to hospital with an ongoing *Clostridium difficile* infection (bacteria that can infect the bowel and cause diarrhoea). A remained in hospital until their death.

C raised concerns with the board about the level of clinical and nursing care provided to A. The family were particularly concerned that staff took the decision to implement the nil by mouth protocol, meaning A would not be given any foods or fluids. The board acknowledged failings and agreed to review relevant practice.

We took independent advice from appropriately qualified advisers. In relation to the clinical care provided, we found that clinical staff took detailed consideration of A's health and were aware how frail they were when admitted to hospital. The records indicated that a good level of investigation took place along with frequent blood tests and x-rays, when appropriate. We considered that the clinical care A received was reasonable. We did not uphold this aspect of C's complaint.

In relation to the nursing care, we found that important information from A's family with regards to the requirement to provide thickened fluids was handled poorly by nursing staff. We found that it was unreasonable to carry out the appropriate swallow test with A using water instead of thickened fluid. In addition to this, risk assessments and person-centred documentation were never completed throughout A's time in hospital. Had this documentation been completed, then failings might have been avoided in A's case, meaning medications and fluids would have been provided. We upheld this aspect of C's complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to A's family for failing to provide a reasonable level of nursing care. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at [www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets](http://www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets).

What we said should change to put things right in future:

- National guidance and standards of care for older people in hospital should be implemented appropriately by the board by demonstrating that appropriate guidance is available for staff when undertaking compromised swallow tests; measures are in place to maximise patients receive their medications; and important documentation is completed on admission and from that, an appropriate person-centred plan of care will be devised.

We have asked the organisation to provide us with evidence that they have implemented the recommendations we have made on this case by the deadline we set.