

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 202001722, Grampian NHS Board  
**Sector:** Health  
**Subject:** Clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Decision:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C complained that the board took too long to offer them steroid/local anaesthetic injections for vulvodynia (chronic pain or discomfort in the vulva). C felt this was dismissive and unsatisfactory. The board said that C did not receive the treatment initially as it was not clinically appropriate at that time. They said in order for the treatment to be effective, there should be a locally tender area to inject which C did not have. The board added that it was important to note that the treatment is unlicensed and so is only to be considered for use when definitely clinically indicated.

We sought independent clinical advice from a consultant. We found that it is right for the board to have a cautious approach to the use of unlicensed treatment. We noted that the treatment C received for many years was reasonable. However, it was later indicated that C had developed a localised area of pain and it would have been reasonable to discuss the treatment with C at that point.

We considered that whilst the care and treatment provided to C was generally reasonable, the board should have discussed the treatment option of steroid/local anaesthetic injections earlier than they did. For this reason, on balance, we upheld C's complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for not discussing the pros and cons of steroid/local anaesthetic injections as a treatment option or offering C the chance to decide whether or not they wanted to try this treatment. 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:

- Patients attending vulval pain clinics should be fully informed about their condition as well as the pros and cons of available treatments. Staff caring for patients attending vulval pain clinics should be aware of the full range of treatment options so that they are able to provide holistic care and advice to patients.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Complaints should be responded to in line with the Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) and issued within the expected timescale of 20 working days. If the board are unable to meet the 20-working day deadline, updates and a new deadline should be issued to C in line with the MCHP.
- Letters of complaint received by the board should be logged and forwarded as appropriate to the complaints and feedback team.

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.