

SPSO decision report

Case: 202003228, A Medical Practice in the Tayside NHS Board area
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: some upheld, recommendations

Summary

C sought help from their GP for various health problems. They were diagnosed with a B12 deficiency (vitamin B12 is an important vitamin within the body which is essential for the production of blood cells and for the 'myelination' (a protective outer coating) of nerves) and complained about the delay in diagnosis.

We took independent advice from a GP. We noted that vitamin B12 deficiency is often diagnosed late as the symptoms will often present gradually; they are not particularly specific to B12 deficiency, and can mimic other diagnoses. There are also limitations with the diagnostic tests for B12 deficiency and many people will have normal blood tests whilst being deficient in B12. We found that there was a slight delay of about six months in diagnosing C's condition. We considered that this delay was understandable in the context of other health issues which were raised at the time and the fact that other blood test results were normal. Therefore, we did not uphold this complaint.

C also complained about the way the practice handled their complaint. We found that the surgery did not refer C to our office and did not appear to have an up-to-date complaints handling procedure. Therefore, we upheld this complaint.

Recommendations

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- The surgery should ensure that all complainants are referred to this office, using a standard paragraph, at the end of the complaints process. The surgery should have a complaints procedure which is compliant with the Model Complaints Handling Procedure for the NHS.

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.