

SPSO decision report

Case: 202101331, Highland NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: not upheld, no recommendations

Summary

C complained about the treatment they received from the board following a knee injury. C's injury had occurred when level 3 of the Scottish Government's COVID-19 lockdown measures were in place, which limited travel between local authorities to essential travel only. C's accident had occurred outwith their own local authority area. C complained that the A&E staff repeatedly asked them about their local accommodation and travel arrangements. C reported that they were only admitted to hospital for one night, and they were obliged to make their own travel arrangements for their discharge the next day despite experiencing severe pain.

The board said that C had been timeously assessed and treated at the A&E, with orthopaedics (specialists in the musculoskeletal system) taking over their care due to the diagnosis of a displaced fracture with foot drop. C's injury had been immobilised with a knee brace and they were assessed using crutches by physiotherapy prior to discharge the next day, with the plan being for C to travel back to their own health board area to arrange further care and treatment of their injury. C was given an immediate discharge letter to pass to the receiving clinical team and a prescription for pain killers.

We took independent advice from an orthopaedic consultant. We found that the board's treatment of C was reasonable, both in terms of the type of injury they had sustained, and in keeping with the guidance in place at the time for management of orthopaedic injuries during the pandemic. We considered it was appropriate for A&E staff to enquire about C's travel and accommodation arrangements to help inform their plan of care. They also commented that without lockdown measures in place, C's injury would have required transfer to a specialist centre for surgical reconstruction. However the guidance at the time had been appropriately followed by the board for non-operative management of the injury with later reconstruction. Therefore, we did not uphold C's complaint.