

SPSO decision report



Case: 202307107, A Medical Practice in the Borders NHS Board area
Sector: Health
Subject: Complaints handling
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained that the practice failed to reasonably respond to their complaint. C had made a complaint to the practice about communication and the service provided by them, particularly in relation to their appointment services, phone lines, and frontline staff. C was concerned by the content and tone of the practice's complaint response.

We found that the practice's handling of C's complaint was unreasonable, including the tone and language of their response and a failure to signpost to the SPSO. We considered some of the language used in their response came across as overly defensive and failed to maintain an appropriately conciliatory tone. The practice also failed to have an appropriate two-stage complaint procedure in place that follows the NHS Scotland Model Complaints Handling Procedure, as they were unaware this applied to them. Therefore, we upheld C's complaint.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for failing to respond to the complaint reasonably. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology available at www.spsso.org.uk/information-leaflets.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Complaint responses should acknowledge the complainant's experience and, in presenting the facts, should use appropriate conciliatory language and tone with the intention of maintaining positive relationships wherever possible.
- The practice should have a complaint procedure that is in line with the NHS Scotland Model Complaints Handling Procedure.

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.