

SPSO decision report

Case: 202307398, Forth Valley NHS Board
Sector: Health
Subject: Clinical treatment / diagnosis
Decision: upheld, recommendations

Summary

C complained about the care and treatment provided to their parent (A). A was assessed by a junior doctor in A&E who ordered various tests and investigations. A was later moved to the acute assessment unit and diagnosed with a perforated bowel. A underwent emergency surgery and developed sepsis. C complained that there was a delay in identifying A's condition. They said that the board focussed on potential cardiac issues rather than an abdominal cause. C considered that this delay resulted in a worse outcome for A.

The board acknowledged that a more senior doctor may have identified the cause of A's symptoms quicker. However, they said that the care provided was reasonable. They also noted that this this complaint had resulted in learning and ongoing development.

We took independent advice from an emergency medicine consultant. We found that there were a number of red flags in A's presentation that should have raised the possibility of significant abdominal pathology. It did not appear that A was reviewed by a senior clinician.

We also found issues in the documentation. No intimate examination was recorded in the records and there was a lack of documentation around the interpretation of an x-ray. Overall, the initial assessment process led to a delay in the diagnosis of acute bowel perforation which is likely to have had a significant effect of the outcome for A. Therefore, we upheld C's complaint

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

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

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

- Patients should receive appropriate treatment including assessment, relevant tests and senior review in accordance with their symptoms.
- Case records should include details of any tests / examinations carried out and the rationale for any decision making.

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.