

## SPSO decision report

**Case:** 202310050, Forth Valley NHS Board  
**Sector:** Health  
**Subject:** Clinical treatment / diagnosis  
**Decision:** upheld, recommendations

### Summary

C complained about the care and treatment that they received when they attended the board's urgent care centre with sudden hearing loss in their right ear. C's hearing loss became permanent and they felt that this could have been avoided.

We took independent advice from a consultant in emergency medicine. We found that the board's assessment of C was unreasonable. While a clinical assessment was undertaken, a clinical hearing assessment was not, which meant that the cause of C's acute hearing loss was not ascertained. This could have led to alternate treatment options. The board also failed to provide reasonable advice on what to do if C's symptoms should continue after five days. The board's response did not reasonably reflect the records available, and their investigation did not identify the failings in C's care. Therefore, we upheld C's complaint.

### Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for failing to reasonably assess C's hearing loss and provide appropriate care and 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:

- Guidance is available to staff which provides a localised and helpful pathway as to the action to take when a patient presents with sudden hearing loss.
- Practitioners delivering the out-of-hours/primary care emergency centre service have an appropriate level of training to assess patients presenting with sudden acute hearing loss.

In relation to complaints handling, we recommended:

- Responses to complaints are accurate, identify failings when they occur and seek to take learning from what happened to make similar failings less likely to occur.

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.