

## September 2021

In this month's e-newsletter:

- Our findings this month
  - Complaints
  - Scottish Welfare Fund reviews
- Independent National Whistleblowing Officer webinars
- COVID-19 information

### Our findings

#### Complaints

This month we:

- published 20 decision reports available [here](#)
- upheld 11 complaints in full or part
- made 31 recommendations for learning and improvement.

#### *Investigation report*

In addition to our decision summaries, this month we are publishing one full investigation report: [201911632 Grampian NHS Board](#) relating to the care and treatment of a patient who died following profound blood loss at the needle insertion site during kidney dialysis. The vascular surgery team was able to stitch the bleeding vessel but the patient deteriorated and died of a heart attack later that day.

We found that a number of individual risk factors and errors combined to cause the bleeding and subsequent death; including insufficient monitoring of the patient's International Normalised Ratio, the medication they were taking and the control of this medication, a lack of urgency in staff escalating the bleeding and other health issues that were not picked up or acted on.

While we welcomed the action already taken by the board in response to this complaint, we saw no evidence of changes to practice or policy regarding fistula bleeds. We asked the board to apologise to the patient's spouse, ensure that staff are properly trained in the areas concerned and to share this learning with associations relating to the wider kidney community.

## Scottish Welfare Fund reviews

### *Statistics*

During August we:

- responded to 92 enquiries
- made 72 decisions
  - 12 community care grants
  - 35 crisis grants
  - 25 self-isolation support grants
- upheld seven (58%) community care grants, six (17%) crisis grants and 13 (52%) self-isolation support grants
- signposted an additional 45 applicants to other sources of assistance, a significant decrease from the 154 we signposted in June. This appears to be a result of a change we made to our introductory phone message in July to reduce the numbers of callers who contact us in error instead of their local council.

### *Case studies*

In recent weeks, we have observed examples of councils failing to gather sufficient information to make a robust decision.

In one case C, who works for a support and advice service, requested an independent review on behalf of their client (A). A had applied for a community care grant for household items and a plumbing repair.

The council awarded the household items but declined the repair as they considered this was an item excluded under Annex A, point six of the guidance (repairs to local authority property). C appealed the decision on the basis that A is a homeowner. At first tier, the council declined the repair under a different exclusion (point 21 of Annex A - substantial repairs to private property).

We reviewed the council's file and spoke with A and C. They provided details of the repair, which was a replacement tap to enable hot water to get to A's bath. A explained that they have a skin condition, which their GP confirmed was best soothed by bathing. We did not consider that replacing a tap represented a substantial improvement to private property, and disagreed with the council that it was an excluded item. We assessed that A qualified under the exceptional pressure criteria due to their mental and physical health conditions, and assessed that the repair met the relevant priority level in place for an award. We instructed the council to award the money for the repair. We provided the council with feedback on their inquisitorial process, as it did not appear that any contact was made with A or C to establish the nature of the repair. We also provided them with feedback on their record-keeping and decision letters.

Further examples can be found in the searchable directory [on our website](#) under the title '*Decision making with limited information*'.

## Independent National Whistleblowing Officer webinars

A recording of our first Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO) webinar is now available to watch online. This covered the role of the confidential contact and raised a number of interesting points.

Thank you to all who attended. The webinar, along with other useful resources, is available [on our website](#).



The second of our INWO webinars will take place at **12pm on Wednesday 29 September 2021** and will cover **good practice in raising concerns**. Register your interest at [INWO@spsso.gov.scot](mailto:INWO@spsso.gov.scot).

The session will take place via a Webex link which we will send to all participants. No special software is required to use Webex; it is accessible through any standard internet browser. It will last an hour and will begin with a short introduction, a presentation from INWO staff and a Q and A session. Feel free to email us your question beforehand if you would prefer not to raise it during the session. The presentation will be recorded and made available afterwards on our website, in case you can't attend the session.

### *INWO e-bulletins*

Our INWO team sends out regular updates with further information about the service. [Our September e-bulletin can be found here](#).

If you would like to receive future e-bulletins from the INWO straight to your inbox, please [register here to sign up to the mailing list](#).

## COVID-19 information

### SPSO

As lockdown restrictions have been lifted, our office still remains closed and our service provision is not changing.

Please read our [website for more service information](#), such as operating hours of our Freephone advice line.

### *Public bodies*

We are mindful that the pressures of the pandemic are affecting all of us, and that front-line complaint handling is challenging. Complaints are very important as they are one of the ways that service users can make their voice heard, especially when other communication routes may not be open to them. In this context it is important that public bodies resource and maintain their complaint handling functions.

We recognise that timescales are challenging and would remind everyone that stage 2 can be extended, but you should keep complainers informed.

We are writing to the CEOs of public bodies this week reminding them of complaint handling duties and things they can do to maintain the service, such as trying to resolve complaints and triaging so important issues don't get missed.

The letter will be published next week on our [COVID-19 updates for public service organisations](#) page.

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