

15 November 2018

Patient was discharged prematurely from hospital's Emergency Department – Ombudsman

Investigation concludes that observations should have been carried out and discharge delayed until patient was well enough to tolerate fluids and food.

A patient who had attended Craigavon Area Hospital complained that she was unfit to be discharged from the hospital's Emergency Department, which she had been admitted to a number of hours earlier.

She was admitted complaining of a migraine headache, vomiting and diarrhoea. She stated that after being examined and given medication, she was ordered out of bed by a doctor and taken into the waiting area of the Emergency Department.

When she later took a taxi home, she stated she continued to vomit during the journey and was unsteady on her feet. She complained that staff were unaware she had received morphine earlier that day and might still be under the influence of it. She believed that the Trust had failed in its duty of care to her.

All relevant material in relation to the patient's complaint was obtained, and independent professional advice received from a consultant in emergency medicine.

The Ombudsman's investigation found that staff in the Emergency Department were aware that the patient had been given morphine earlier in the day. This element of the complaint was not upheld.

However, failures were found in relation to the following matters:

- After receiving treatment, the patient should have been moved to an observation ward and not the waiting room
- Observations should have been carried out by Trust staff and her discharge delayed until the Emergency Department doctor was able to determine whether she was well enough to tolerate oral intake of fluids and food.
- Although the doctor recalls telling the patient to re-attend if her symptoms were to return or worsen, this advice should have been recorded but was not.

The Ombudsman recommended that the Trust apologise to the patient for the injustice suffered.