

Case Reference: 201917306
Sector: Health and Social Care

Trust failed to give cancer patient adequate care

The Belfast Trust has apologised to the family of a woman for failing to provide her with an adequate standard of care.

The patient's daughter complained after her mother was referred by her GP to the Urology department. The Urology department then transferred her to Gastroenterology, which in turn referred her to Gynae-Oncology. The complainant said that the Trust demonstrated a general lack of co-ordination in her mother's care, and that no-one took responsibility for her treatment.

She said her mother waited 71 days for a biopsy and that she passed away without knowing her full diagnosis. She said that the lack of urgency in identifying either the primary tumour or the cause of her mother's pain contributed to her death.

She also said there was not enough communication between clinicians and the family, and that she was not happy with the overall level of nursing care, specifically in her mother's final days.

We looked at the patient's medical records, the notes of meetings, and got advice from specialist advisors who looked at different aspects of the patient's care.

We found the Trust should have done a number of things differently. It should have:

- Done an earlier biopsy
- Carried out more medical assessments of the patient
- Completed her medical reports more accurately
- Done more to prepare the patient and her family for a cancer diagnosis and to arrange counselling and support
- Kept better records of communications with the patient and her family.

We welcomed the improvements the Trust has made through its new electronic dietician referral system and commended the commitment it has shown to learning and to service improvements to its specialist palliative care services.

However, in light of the failings in this case we asked the Trust to apologise to the patient's family.

To ensure better monitoring and to prevent delays in the future, we also recommend it review the process by which it transfers cancer patients from one treatment pathway to another.