

INWO decision report



Case: 202407203, Grampian NHS Board

Subject: Complaint handling

Decision: Fully upheld

Summary

The complainant (C) raised concerns about the speak up culture within a service. They were concerned that managers were not listening to staff concerns or taking appropriate action when concerns were raised. The complainant felt this contributed to an environment where staff did not feel safe or supported to speak up.

C also described a lack of professional respect for staff carrying out a specialised role and raised concerns about the rapid introduction of a pilot service.

The Board investigated these concerns under the National Whistleblowing Standards (the Standards) and provided a Stage 2 response. C was not satisfied with the Board's response and brought their complaint to the Independent National Whistleblowing Officer (INWO).

C complained that the Board's Stage 2 response lacked detail, the investigation was not thorough or impartial, that they were not supported by the Board during the whistleblowing process and that their identity was not protected. C also complained that the Board had not addressed their concerns about speak up culture.

The complaints we agreed to investigate were that:

- the Board did not manage the risks relating to C's concerns about the speak up culture within the service, and
- the Board did not handle the concern in line with the National Whistleblowing Standards.

We reviewed information provided by the complainant and the Board. We considered relevant organisational policies and the Boards responsibilities under the the Standards. We also carried out interviews with relevant staff.

We found that the Board did not address C's concerns about speak up culture within the service and therefore did not manage any associated risks. We also found failings in the Board's concerns handling under the Standards.

We upheld C's complaints.

Recommendations

What we asked the organisation to do in this case:

- Apologise to C for not handling their concerns in line with the Standards and for not fully investigating their concerns about speak up culture. The apology should meet the standards set out in the SPSO guidelines on apology.

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

- That staff are aware that that the Board supports and encourages a culture of speaking up within the service to improve patient safety and service delivery. That raising concerns is valued as a route to learning and improvement. Staff should be aware of the Board's whistleblowing policy and the support available to them when raising concerns.

In relation to compliance with the Standards, we recommended:

- That Board is aware of its responsibilities under the Standards when handling concerns and the Board's procedure is suitable. The Board is aware of its responsibilities under the Standards to provide support to whistleblowers throughout the process. Staff investigating whistleblowing concerns are aware of the requirements under the Standards.