

Complaint case study for publication on Trust website February 2016:

Mrs R raised a complaint about a delay in providing chemotherapy to her late husband, Mr R.

Mrs R raised concerns that her husband had been let down, as there had been a three-month delay from Mr R's first outpatient appointment and commencement of chemotherapy. During this time, his oesophageal cancer had spread to his stomach.

Our findings

This complaint was investigated by the Complaints Team and following investigation, the complaint was not upheld.

Mr R was first seen in the oncology clinic on 22 May 2015, with a diagnosis of oesophageal cancer. At that time, it was felt that the cancer was operable and the use of pre-operative chemotherapy was discussed with Mr R. However, further investigations were required. A PET CT scan was booked for 27 May, exploratory surgery was provisionally booked for 2 June and an endoscopic ultrasound scan was arranged for 11 June.

During the outpatient consultation, the doctor discussed a clinical trial which was running at that time for patients with a certain type of cancer (HER-2 positive). One of the drugs involved was known to affect patients' hearing. Mr R informed the doctor that he had a history of tinnitus with associated hearing loss, so the doctor organised a hearing test as a pre-emptive measure.

Mr R saw the consultant oncologist on 12 June with all the results of the investigations, which sadly revealed that the cancer had spread and was not amenable to surgery. The use of palliative chemotherapy was discussed and an echocardiogram was requested to ensure the patient was fit to receive one of the drugs this would involve.

Mr R was seen by the chemotherapy service on 18 June and commenced chemotherapy on 7 July, once his echocardiogram and hearing test results were available.

The complaint was not upheld on the basis that once Mr R was under the care of the oncologists, his treatment progressed within the recommended timeframes.