

**Follow-up care of woman with bowel issues
18HDC00740, 27 May 2019**

*General practitioner ~ Medical centre ~ Bowel issues ~
Colonoscopy referral ~ Communication ~ Rights 4(1), 6(1)*

A woman visited a medical centre about her high blood pressure and bowel issues, including rectal bleeding. The woman was seen by a general practitioner (GP), who arranged a follow-up consultation to review the bowel issues further. However, the GP did not record the bowel issues in the clinical notes.

The GP ordered blood tests and a faecal occult blood test (FOB), but did not prepare appropriate paperwork for the FOB test, and the faeces sample was discarded by the laboratory. Subsequently, the GP realised that FOB tests are not recommended for patients with the woman's symptoms, but neglected to communicate this information to the woman.

The following week, the woman had her follow-up consultation with the GP, who decided to refer her for a colonoscopy, but omitted to set up the referral in Medtech.

The woman contacted the medical centre several months later and asked about her colonoscopy referral. The GP then realised that she had not processed the referral. The GP did not inform the management team of her omission, and did not complete a Learning Event form. In addition, the woman was not informed of the omission until she telephoned the practice again a few days later to follow up on her previous call.

Findings

It was held that the GP did not provide services with reasonable care and skill, and breached Right 4(1) for the following reasons:

- a) She did not order a CBC (complete blood count) test, and attempted to order an FOB test when it was not recommended for individuals presenting with the woman's symptoms.
- b) She did not perform a digital rectal examination at the second consultation.
- c) She did not process the colonoscopy referral in a timely manner.
- d) She did not inform the woman of the estimated waiting time for a colonoscopy appointment.
- e) She did not process the referral in an appropriate manner once she became aware of her omission to set up the referral.

It was also held that the GP failed to immediately disclose the omission to upload the referral and, accordingly, that she breached Right 6(1) of the Code.

The following adverse comments were also made about the GP:

- a) She did not complete the Learning Event form.
- b) She did not communicate the reason that the FOB test was no longer needed.
- c) She did not record the bowel issues in the clinical notes following the first consultation.

It was held that the failings identified were matters of individual clinical judgement and practice, and that the medical centre had taken such steps as were reasonably practicable to prevent the GP's errors. Accordingly, the medical centre did not breach the Code.

Recommendations

It was recommended that the GP provide a written apology to the woman, arrange an independent audit of referrals she had instigated, and enter into a mentoring relationship with a general practitioner, to focus on the area of common malignancies, particularly bowel cancer.