Multiple dislocations following hip joint replacement
(08HDC02404, 22 December 2008)

Orthopaedic surgeon ~ Private hospital ~ Public hospital ~ Hip replacement ~ Dislocation ~ Information ~ Co-ordination of care ~ Rights 4(1), Right 6(1)(b)

A 62-year-old man complained about the services provided by an orthopaedic surgeon, who performed his bilateral total hip joint replacements at a private hospital. The man's right hip dislocated the following morning when a ward nurse turned him to inspect his wound. The orthopaedic surgeon was notified and the man was returned to theatre where the hip was relocated under anaesthetic. He was discharged home after six days.

The man's left hip dislocated during the first night he was at home. He was taken by ambulance to a public hospital where the dislocation was reduced under anaesthetic. Three days later, his left hip dislocated again and was relocated at the public hospital. The orthopaedic surgeon was contacted by the public hospital orthopaedic team and the options for treating the man were discussed. Within 24 hours the man returned with a further dislocation of his left hip. The hip was relocated and he was discharged with a hip splint and an appointment for the orthopaedic outpatient clinic. Later that day his hip again dislocated and he was returned to the public hospital. The orthopaedic surgeon was contacted and the decision was made to admit the man.

The man's hip joint replacements were replaced. He developed a wound infection and was referred to the infectious diseases team. Unfortunately the antibiotics required to combat the infection resulted in vertigo, which remained a problem a year later.

It was held that the orthopaedic surgeon did not provide sufficient information about the expected risks, including possible dislocation, and breached Right 6(1)(b). It was also held that the standard of the surgery was suboptimal, breaching Right 4(1).

It was held that the man received appropriate treatment and care from the private and public hospitals, and that they did not breach the Code.