

Failure to manage a thyroid mass
17HDC00237, 11 June 2018

General practitioner ~ Ultrasound scan ~ Referral ~ Thyroid lump ~ Right 4(1)

A woman attended a GP because she was concerned about a mass in her neck. The GP arranged for blood tests to be carried out and asked a second GP to make a referral for an ultrasound scan once the results of the blood test were known. The second GP did not make the referral.

The woman saw the second GP six months later for a routine appointment. The second GP examined the mass but did not record this action or her findings.

One month after the appointment, the second GP sent a referral for an ultrasound scan. The referral was prioritised as routine based on the information provided by the second GP.

The woman saw the second GP again on two further occasions. The second GP did not examine the mass on the woman's neck or review its management, despite it having increased in size at the latter of these two occasions.

The woman had an ultrasound scan, which identified a suspicious lesion. The woman attended the second GP and a biopsy was arranged. The biopsy result showed an inoperable anaplastic carcinoma of the thyroid.

Findings

The second GP failed to refer the woman for an ultrasound scan when she was instructed to do so. When the second GP did make the referral, she failed to convey appropriate urgency. In addition, the second GP failed to track the progress of the referral and to review the management of the mass. As a result, the second GP failed to provide services with reasonable care and skill and breached Right 4(1).

The medical centre was found to be vicariously liable for the actions of the second GP.

Recommendations

It was recommended that the second GP undertake training in the management of thyroid masses and provide a written apology to the woman's family.