

**Assessment by paramedics
16HDC01960, 15 June 2018**

*Ambulance service ~ Paramedics ~ Shortness of breath ~ Assessment ~ Vital signs ~
12-lead ECG ~ Transportation to hospital ~ Documentation ~ Right 4(1)*

A man in his seventies was assessed in his home by two paramedics after he complained of shortness of breath. The paramedics examined him, recorded his vital signs and carried out some assessments. The man's blood pressure and respiration rate were found to be raised, and he had an abnormally low temperature. Another set of observations were taken and recorded, however these observations did not include the man's blood glucose, temperature, capillary refill or pain score. Neither paramedic advised the man about his initial abnormal observations. The paramedics did not obtain a 12-lead ECG at any time during their assessments and made the decision that he did not need to be transported to hospital.

Shortly after the paramedics left the residence, the man collapsed and did not respond to efforts to resuscitate him.

Findings

The two paramedics who initially assessed the man had a responsibility to consider the man's vital signs carefully in light of his presenting complaint and his medical history. A further recording of the man's temperature should have been obtained and he should have been advised of his abnormal vital signs, and a 12-lead ECG performed prior to making the decision not to transport him to hospital. The paramedics should have documented the discussion about the decision not to transport the man to hospital, and the reasons for the decision. By failing to do the above actions, the two paramedics did not provide the man services with reasonable care and skill, and breached Right 4(1).

Recommendations

It was recommended that each paramedic:

- a) Provide a written apology to the man's family.
- b) Provide a progress report, including anonymised examples, of all changes made to their practice since the complaint.
- c) Undertake further education and training on vital signs and when these are considered to be significantly abnormal.
- d) Undertake a refresher course on 12-lead STEMI training.
- e) Undertake a refresher course on the ambulance service's electronic documentation system.