

**Care and treatment of woman presenting with rapid heartbeat
17HDC00490, 15 December 2017**

Doctor ~ Assessment ~ Tachycardia ~ Standard of care ~ Right 4(1)

A 42-year-old woman presented to a medical centre and reported having been ill for three days, with difficulty breathing and difficulty sleeping. She was seen by a doctor, who requested the practice nurse carry out an electrocardiogram (ECG). The doctor did not take the woman's temperature. The ECG showed an abnormally rapid heartbeat (sinus tachycardia). The doctor also observed that the woman had a cool periphery and hypotension.

The doctor considered the most likely cause of the sinus tachycardia was alcohol abuse and anxiety. The doctor prescribed medication to slow down the woman's heart rate, and told her to return if her symptoms did not improve within two days.

The following day the nurse tried to follow up with the woman, but she could not be contacted. Later that day, the woman was found deceased.

Findings

The doctor was found to have breached Right 4(1) by failing to take the woman's temperature, recognise the severity of her symptoms, and take appropriate action in response. The doctor was referred to the Director of Proceedings, who decided not to issue proceedings.

The medical centre was not found in breach of the Code.

Recommendations

The Deputy Commissioner recommended the doctor provide a formal written apology to the woman's family, and the Medical Council of New Zealand consider carrying out a competence review should the doctor reapply for a practising certificate.