

HOSPITAL AUTHORITY (HA)

Case No. OCAC 27/95

Complaint against HA - delay in issuing a medical report

Mr A applied to the Medical Report Unit of a HA hospital for a medical report. He paid \$455 for the required handling charge and received an acknowledgement which stated that the report would be, upon its completion, mailed to him. He had made repeated phone calls to the hospital urging for early issue of the report but to no avail.

2. Nevertheless, he was advised by an officer of the Unit to send a written reminder to them in order to speed up his application. He accordingly wrote to the hospital and he also approached the Patient Relations Officer for assistance who promised to intervene on his behalf. He then received a reply from the hospital informing him that the hospital would expedite preparation of the report. When he called the Unit again later, the same officer advised him to write in again. Mr A therefore complained to this Office.

3. Upon investigation, this Office found out that -

- (a) The hospital had experienced some difficulty in tracing Mr A's medical records which were only made available two months after the application. However, as the case doctor was then on leave, Mr A's medical report was not completed and issued until one and a half months later.
- (b) HA had no performance pledge on the time for preparation of a medical report. It could range from the same day of the application to three/four months and priority would be given to urgent referral cases to other medical institutions or for those who would leave the territory within a short period of time.
- (c) Mr A sent in his application on the standard form by post and he had not indicated on the form whether his request for a medical report was urgent. As a matter of fact, the standard form does not ask applicants to indicate the degree of urgency.
- (d) Upon enquiry by Mr A, the officers in the Medical Report Unit and the Patients Relations Office both advised him that it would be advisable to send in a written reminder. Unfortunately, the written reminder from Mr A had not really served any useful purpose. For a client-oriented service, such unhelpful and bureaucratic response to enquiries would mar its image and would not meet the rising public expectation.

4. This Office is of the view that despite the absence of a performance pledge nor any written promise to Mr A on the timing of issuing the medical report to him, there had been delays in processing his application in that -

- (a) had Mr A's medical records been available earlier before the case doctor proceeded on leave or had the task of writing the less-than-one-page report be assigned to another doctor when the case doctor was on leave, the report could be issued earlier; and
- (b) despite Mr A's repeated verbal reminders and written reminder, little had been done by the hospital. Although his written reminder was acknowledged by the hospital, the reply did not explain the reason for the delay nor indicate the time scale for the issue of the medical report.

- 5. In the circumstances, this Office concludes that this complaint is **substantiated**.
- 6. In concluding this complaint, HA has accepted the recommendations of this Office and the hospital concerned has already implemented a performance pledge to issue medical reports within six weeks counting from the date of receipt of the request by the hospital. In addition applicants will no longer be asked to send in written reminders.