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Hospital conditions not the cause of patient's pneumonia

An investigation into a man's complaint has found that the conditions on a hospital ward did not cause his wife to contract pneumonia.

The patient was admitted to the Emergency Department of Belfast's Royal Victoria Hospital after suffering a fractured ankle. She had a number of other underlying health conditions. She had surgery on her ankle, but later developed pneumonia and a short time later suffered two cardiac arrests in hospital. She sadly passed away the following day.

The man made a number of allegations about his wife's care in the hospital. He complained that she contracted hospital-acquired pneumonia because the ward she was being treated in had a broken window and a malfunctioning heating system.

An independent consultant physician was asked for his opinion on whether the conditions on the ward caused the patient to contract pneumonia. He stated that hospital-acquired pneumonia is caused by hospital germs and can be contracted by patients who lack immunity, and not merely by those who are exposed to a cold environment.

The Ombudsman accepted the advice that the poor facilities would not have caused the patient to contract the condition and did not uphold this element of the complaint. However, she did note the lack of additional measures put in place to ensure the patient's comfort, and welcomed the Health Trust's apology on this issue.

The man also alleged that hospital staff did not manage the fluids his wife was being given, and that her diabetes was not sufficiently taken into account by the medical staff who were treating her.

The investigation found that although Trust staff did not properly monitor and adequately record the patient's fluid input, there was no evidence that this failing caused the patient's condition to deteriorate.

The Ombudsman's independent advisor also stated there was evidence that the patient's blood glucose levels were measured, which would indicate that her diabetes was taken into account and was under control during her time in hospital.

This part of the complaint was not upheld.