



**Office of the
Health Complaints
Commissioner
2007**

700-0609022 – Royal Hobart Hospital – The Prescribing of Flucloxacillin

Section 23 (1)(d) – That the prescribing medical officer had failed to exercise due skill

The complaint concerned the prescribing of Flucloxacillin penicillin medication to a patient of the Department of Neurosurgery at the Royal Hobart Hospital with a known history of allergic reaction to penicillin.

Whilst the complainant was an inpatient, he sustained a wound infection following a discectomy of the lower back. The complainant had a known history of allergy to penicillin and despite this having been recorded by the hospital, including through the use of a red wristband worn by the complainant to indicate he had a penicillin allergy, he was prescribed Flucloxacillin to treat the wound infection. The complainant stated that he subsequently experienced an adverse reaction to the medication and that the prescribing medical officer should not have prescribed the medication given his long history of allergic reaction to penicillin.

The Commissioner determined that an investigation under Part 6 of the *Health Complaints Act 1995* should be conducted. The investigation considered the practice of treating Flucloxacillin as the drug of choice for wound related infections on the Neurosurgical Unit, and the decision to prescribe this drug to the complainant given his stated drug allergy to penicillin.

During the course of the investigation, independent advice was sought from the Department of Pharmacy at the University of Tasmania in relation to the prescribing of Flucloxacillin. The advice indicated that an alternative range of medication to treat the wound infection should have been considered in the circumstances and that the extent of the allergy should have been confirmed in the circumstances.

The prescribing medical officer and the hospital were unable to explain the prescribing decision in detail and confirmed there was no investigation to confirm the extent of the allergy prior to prescribing Flucloxacillin.

At the conclusion of the investigation, the Commissioner found the prescribing medical officer had failed to exercise due skill and accordingly recommended that the hospital develop guidelines for medical staff in relation to the prescribing of medication to patients with penicillin allergies that are consistent with the Australian Antibiotic Guidelines and that the prescribing medical officer be provided with

further guidance in relation to the prescribing of penicillin and the recording of medical notes. The hospital agreed to the recommendations.