Failure to diagnose fractures

Why do some fractures go undiagnosed?

Virtually any fracture can go undiagnosed but some are easier to miss than others. Fractures to bones in the wrist and particularly scaphoid fractures can be difficult to detect on initial presentation at Accident and Emergency, even assuming that an x-ray examination is performed. However, this is by no means the only area of misdiagnosis.

What problems are caused by undiagnosed fractures?

When the correct diagnosis has not been made, a patient is unlikely to be referred straight away to the orthopaedics department for treatment. They will likely spend further time in pain before the mistake is picked up, by which time irreparable and avoidable damage may well have been done. Unfortunately, it is often also true that the longer a fracture is left untreated, the more likely it is to need surgery.

How is a claim won?

To win a claim involving an undiagnosed fracture, you need to prove that either the doctor should have diagnosed your fracture earlier, either by requesting the appropriate x-rays by interpreting those x-rays correctly; or that the treatment for your fracture was inappropriate and negligent.

You then need to prove that as a result of the negligence, your injury was made worse. This can be as simple as it prolonged your recovery period resulting in additional pain and suffering, or that it meant you needed surgery when you would not have otherwise, or in some cases, that you have permanent damage as a result of the negligence.

How do we build a case?

We evaluate the patient's history to confirm whether the fracture was there at all times and whether it could or should have been noted on x-ray examination. We also look at what the medical professionals should have done and compare this to what they actually did.

These claims often require medical expertise in the fields of A&E medicine, radiology and orthopaedics. These experts help us assess whether there has been a breach of the hospital's duty of care. We would normally expect an orthopaedic expert to comment on what damage was done, and whether this could have been avoided if you had been diagnosed or treated correctly straight away. The orthopaedic expert also assesses your current condition and future prognosis to help us establish the
effect that the hospital’s mistake has had on your overall outcome, which affects the value of any claim you may have.

For more information, contact Gillian Clark on 0117 239 8012, email gclark@metcalfes.co.uk, or visit medical-negligence.uk.com.