



**Northern Region Health
Coordination Centre
Level 9
Bledisloe House
24 Wellesley Street West,
Auckland CBD, Auckland 1010**

15 December 2021

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Re: Official Information Act request – Patient Transfers out of Auckland due to the current COVID outbreak

Thank you for your Official Information Act request transferred from the Ministry of Health to the Northern Region DHBs on 27 October 2021:

1. **How many patients have been transported from Auckland to other DHBs to receive emergent care unable to be provided otherwise?**
2. **Of those patients, can you please provide a breakdown of the DHBs these patients have been sent to?**
3. **Of those patients, can you please provide a breakdown of the departmental/medical area those patients are needing transportation for? Eg. NICU, surgical, medical etc.**

Response to Qs 1,2 &3

I am responding on behalf of the Northern Region Health Coordination Centre (NRHCC), the COVID-19 response and vaccination team set up by the Northland, Waitematā, Auckland, and Counties Manukau DHBs.

As you will be aware the Northern region encompassing Northland, Waitematā, Auckland and Counties Manukau DHBs have been particularly impacted by the August 2021 COVID-19 Delta outbreak, with an increased demand on hospital and specialist services.

As part of our Northern region response to this outbreak we have established regular communication with DHB colleagues across the country and the Ministry of Health through a range of forums, to ensure there is ongoing and timely access to highly specialised clinical services provided by DHBs within the Northern region for both regional and national populations.

The processes in place regionally and nationally to support timely access to acute and complex care during the COVID-19 outbreak are consistent with historical and established practices whereby DHBs work collectively at a regional or national level to respond to instances of peak demand or reduced capacity, such as during the Waikato DHB cyber-attack and the Whakaari/White Island eruption.

Since the start of the August COVID-19 outbreak there have been two occasions where Auckland DHB and Counties Manukau DHBs have had to implement alternative arrangements to care for patients who would ordinarily have received their tertiary level of care within the Auckland region.

1. Acute spinal cord impairment services

Counties Manukau DHB and Canterbury DHB are the two national providers of acute traumatic and non-traumatic spinal cord injury services for the New Zealand population. Counties Manukau DHB provides this service for the populations of the Northern region DHBs and the Midland region DHBs - Waikato, Bay of Plenty, Lakes and Tairāwhiti.

For a period of approximately one month from the last week of August to the last week of September, an arrangement was put in place to divert patients from the Midland region DHBs who required admission for the management of their acute spinal injuries from Counties Manukau DHB to Waikato and Canterbury DHB.

During this four-week period, this arrangement resulted in two patients being sent to Canterbury DHB and one to Waikato DHB rather than to Counties Manukau DHB for the acute management of their spinal injuries.

This reduced demand on ICU capacity at Counties Manukau DHB at a time of increasing COVID-19-related ICU demand.

2. Level 3 Neonatal Services

During the first week of October, a COVID-19 exposure event within the Auckland DHB neonatal unit led to some nursing staff being stood down in accordance with public health guidance. This impacted on the level 3 neonatal capacity available at Auckland DHB.

The Northern region DHBs work together through an established neonatal network to coordinate regional neonatal capacity at times of increased demand. The Northern region also works with obstetric and neonatal colleagues nationally when peak demand requires the transfer of women or babies between obstetric and neonatal units across the country who have capacity. The need to transfer women out of the Northern region due to neonatal capacity constraints occurs on an occasional and infrequent basis.

Seven women were transferred to obstetric services outside of the Auckland region to give birth, to enable their babies to subsequently receive neonatal care in DHB hospitals that had level 3 neonatal capacity. Of these seven women, four were sent to Waikato DHB, two were sent to Capital and Coast DHB and one was sent to Southern DHB.

All women and their babies were returned to their DHB-of-domicile as soon as capacity was available and the babies were clinically stable enough to be able to be transported.

I trust that this information is helpful.

You are entitled to seek a review of the response by the Ombudsman under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act. Information about how to make a complaint is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, or an edited version of this response, may be published on the Auckland DHB website.

Yours sincerely,



Ailsa Claire, OBE
Chief Executive