



1 March 2022



Dear [REDACTED]

Re: OIA request – Media access to DHB premises during COVID-19 pandemic

Thank you for your Official Information Act request received 15 February seeking information from Waitematā District Health Board (DHB) about media access to our facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Before responding to your specific questions, it may be useful to provide some context about our services.

Waitematā is the largest and one of the most rapidly growing DHBs in the country, serving a population of around 650,000 across the North Shore, Waitakere and Rodney areas. We are the largest employer in the district, employing around 8,600 people across more than 80 locations.

In addition to providing care to our own resident population, we are the Northern Region provider of forensic mental health services and child rehabilitation services, plus the metro Auckland provider of child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.

In response to your request, we are able to provide the following information:

- 1. What was your board's policy regarding media access to your DHB premises to interview staff and patients and take photographs and video before any COVID-19 restrictions were introduced?**

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Waitematā DHB allowed media access to our facilities by prior agreement and where this would not impact on service-delivery or patient/staff privacy.

- 2. Were any new conditions for media access introduced as a result of COVID-19?**
- 3. If so, how was this decision made and why?**
- 4. What were the new conditions and how did they affect access at different alert levels and under the current traffic light system?**

As a result of the pandemic, it has been necessary to introduce tight visiting restrictions to minimise the potential for transmission within our services and to help keep staff and patients safe.

This has included the temporary suspension of all visitation at the upper levels of the previous 'Alert Level' framework, except in compassionate circumstances or when a woman was giving birth. In these scenarios, visiting was allowed by nominated people by prior agreement and under strict conditions.

Under the 'traffic light' system now in place, restrictions remain in place but inpatients are able to receive nominated visitors on alternate days.

Similar arrangements have been in place at other hospitals across the country. While this has prevented media from accessing our facilities, we have worked with news outlets to find pragmatic solutions.

Examples include:

- Cooperating with Stuff to facilitate the 'You're Awesome' campaign celebrating the contribution of frontline health workers during the pandemic. This saw staff responding to Stuff questions and making themselves available for photographs outdoors on hospital grounds;
- Connecting a news outlet with the parents of the first baby born in 2022 to conduct an interview by phone and send photographs directly to the journalist. Previously, this situation was likely to have seen a journalist and photographer enter our maternity ward.

5. What is your board's intentions for the future regards media access under COVID-19?

As you will be aware, DHBs are being disestablished by the Government from 1 July to create a new single national health service.

Until that time, and assuming the pandemic remains, it is Waitematā DHB's intention to continue striking a balance between protecting the health and privacy of our patients and staff with respecting the role of the media to report on matters of genuine public interest.

6. Do you feel your media access rules are consistent with the media's responsibilities to report accurately and promptly on issues, and also with the right of patients and staff to interact freely with the media if they consent?

This question seeks an opinion and is, therefore, not a request for official information.

I trust that this information is helpful.

Waitematā DHB supports the open disclosure of information to assist community understanding of how we are delivering publicly funded healthcare. This includes the proactive publication of anonymised Official Information Act responses on our website from 10 working days after they have been released.

If you consider there are good reasons why this response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider your views.

Yours sincerely



Director of Communications
Waitematā District Health Board