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Re: Official Information Act request – Media Access Policy

I refer to your Official Information Act request received 15 February requesting 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?**
- 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?**
- 5. What is your board's intentions for the future regards media access under COVID-19?**
- 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?**

Response

Auckland DHB aims to respond to media access requests in a timely and transparent manner.

We are conscious of the needs of the news media and aim to work effectively with them in a positive and proactive manner. We are also mindful of our requirement to be transparent as a public entity and provide the public with health information.

This is currently balanced with the requirement to prioritise managing the operational response to a global pandemic and, as always, the ongoing healthcare needs of our community and patients in our care.

- 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?**

Auckland DHB's policy regarding media access has been in place since before COVID-19 restrictions were introduced.

In summary, our policy is that access to interview, photograph or film staff and patients on our premises is at the discretion of the DHB and requests are considered on a case-by-case basis, in consultation with clinical and operational leadership. This is to ensure that the presence of media does not interfere with the privacy and safety of patients and staff, nor the DHB's ability to provide clinical care to patients. Permission must therefore be obtained via the Auckland DHB Communications Team before the journalist and/or camera operator arrive on site.

2. Were any new conditions for media access introduced as a result of COVID-19?

Auckland DHB did not introduce any new conditions for media access as a result of COVID-19.

We do acknowledge that in part of March and in April 2020, to comply with COVID-19 national alert level 4 guidelines, we restricted visitor access to our buildings. During this time, access was only permitted for parents of children in our care, birthing partners of women in labour, or for whānau visiting for compassionate reasons such as at end of life.

3. If so, how was this decision made and why?

As noted above, Auckland DHB did not introduce any new conditions for media access as a result of COVID-19.

4. What were the new conditions and how did they affect access at different alert levels and under the current traffic light system?

As noted above, Auckland DHB did not introduce any new conditions for media access as a result of COVID-19.

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

We are conscious of the needs of the news media and aim to continue working effectively with them in a positive and proactive manner, as outlined in our answers above and below.

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?

Auckland DHB's media-related objectives include:

- To respond promptly and appropriately to the needs of the news media and to work effectively with them in a positive and proactive manner.
- To ensure that all information given to the media about the Auckland DHB is accurate and consistent throughout all levels of the organisation.
- To ensure that patient and commercial confidentiality is observed in all communication.
- To ensure that the presence of news media personnel does not interfere with the privacy and safety of patients and staff, and the DHB's ability to provide health services to patients.

Auckland DHB recognises in our policies and procedures that:

- Our patients and clients have the right to be interviewed by the media. We ask that requests be directed via the Communications Team so they can check if the patient, client or whānau representative gives consent and if there is any clinical reason why an interview should not take place.

- Senior doctors can comment publicly and engage in public debate on matters relevant to their professional expertise and experience, as outlined in the MECA for Senior Medical Officers.
- Employees have the right to speak to media in a private capacity. We ask that they first consult with the Communications Team if the matter pertains to or relates to information received in the course of their employment at Auckland DHB and that they ensure they are speaking in a private capacity, not on behalf of the DHB.

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 at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or freephone 0800 802 602.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'MS', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr Michael Shepherd
Acting Chief Executive