

21<sup>st</sup> January 2022



### **Official Information Act Request for – Media Communications during Delta**

I write in response to your Official Information Act request received by us 6<sup>th</sup> December 2021, you requested the following information:

- 1. Any decision by the DHB communications and media team stopping a media interview going ahead with medical staff (after an interview had been set up)**
- 2. Any other instances in which medical staff agreed to talk to the media and they were prevented from doing so.**
- 3. Any communication to/from the media team and the senior management team and executives about requests for interviews during the Delta outbreak. For the avoidance of doubt, the information sought relates to the public health response to Covid-19 during the Delta outbreak. Date range August 2021 (Delta outbreak detected) to November 30, 2021.**

### **Counties Manukau Health Response:**

For context Counties Manukau Health (CM Health) employs over 8,500 staff and provides health and support services to people living in the Counties Manukau region (approx. 601,490 people). We see over 118,000 people in our Emergency Department each year, and over 2,000 visitors come through Middlemore Hospital daily.

Our services are delivered via hospital, outpatient, ambulatory and community-based models of care. We provide regional and supra-regional specialist services i.e. for orthopaedics, plastics, burns and spinal services. There are also several specialist services provided including tertiary surgical services, medical services, mental health and addiction services.

- 1. Any decision by the DHB communications and media team stopping a media interview going ahead with medical staff (after an interview had been set up)**
- 2. Any other instances in which medical staff agreed to talk to the media and they were prevented from doing so.**

CM Health tries to facilitate media interviews as requested and does not stop or block media interviews. In regards to speaking on behalf of the DHB or in a hospital capacity, these requests are discussed with the divisions leadership team for their input, a decision is then made on whether an interview occurs, this is not a decision made by the Communications Team.

Requests for clinicians to speak on behalf of the DHB are considered on a case by case basis as there are a number of aspects to consider such as, whether the clinician wants to participate in

the interview, whether they are the right person to speak on the subject, and the capacity of the organisation to facilitate the interview within the media timeframe.

In their personal capacity, Senior Medical Officers (SMOs) are entitled to talk to media as part of their Multi Employer Collective Agreement agreements.

We are very conscious of the requirement to be transparent as a public entity and to provide the public with health information, and 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 the community.

**3. Any communication to/from the media team and the senior management team and executives about requests for interviews during the Delta outbreak. For the avoidance of doubt, the information sought relates to the public health response to Covid-19 during the Delta outbreak. Date range August 2021 (Delta outbreak detected) to November 30, 2021.**

CM Health receives a number of media requests per month and any single request may have a number of communications associated with it. To source, review and collate all of these emails we would need to go review the email inboxes of multiple staff members of the Communications and Senior Management Teams.

Due to the large quantity of this information and location in various digital files, non-clinical staff would need to review individual digital files over the course of this period. These files will hold a substantial quantity of sensitive and private material and it would not be appropriate to use a contractor to review the records. This would take the frontline staff away from their non-clinical work and prejudice our ability to provide core non-clinical services in the current environment. We have considered whether charging or extending the timeframe for responding to this aspect of your request would assist us in managing this work and have concluded it would not.

We have, therefore, determined to decline this specific element of your request under Section 18(f) of the Official Information Act due to substantial collation and research.

However, CM Health keeps an informal media log where our Communications team record brief detail of media requests. We have reviewed this log and are able to provide you with brief detail of the requests for interview from the beginning of the Delta outbreak, 17<sup>th</sup> August 2021 to November 2021. The table in appendix 1 reflects the date, media outlet, subject, overview of request and whether the interview was facilitated.

As you can see from the overview, we facilitated most of the interviews, where interviews were declined this was mostly due to unavailability of staff for interview.

I trust this information answers your request. 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](http://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz) or Freephone 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response or an edited version of this may be published on the Counties Manukau Health website. If you consider there are good reasons why this response should not be made publicly available, we will be happy to consider this.

Yours sincerely



**Fepulea'i Margie Apa**  
**Chief Executive Officer, Counties Manukau Health**

**Appendix 1 – Delta Media Interview Requests - 17<sup>th</sup> August 2021 to 30<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

Date received	Media outlet	Subject	Request and Outcome
31-Aug-21	RNZ	Covid	Request to interview regarding Covid protocols and negative pressure rooms. Media release provided and discussion with NRHCC Communications.
31-Aug-21	Newshub	Covid	Request to interview an Intensivist - referred to NRHCC.
08-Sep-21	The AM Show	Covid	Interview request for the AM Show regarding Covid. Attempted to arrange, received no response.
08-Sep-21	RNZ	Covid	Request to interview CMO regarding covid-19 deferred appointments/surgeries and operational queries - referred to earlier interview with RNZ in the morning and also referred to NRHCC.
08-Sep-21	Newshub	Covid	Request to interview CMO about Covid cases in ED. Request declined due to unavailability.
09-Sep-21	TVNZ	Covid	Request to interview a representative about a Covid positive case. Interview facilitated.
10-Sep-21	Discovery	Covid	Request to interview CEO/Board Chair regarding pressure on CMDHB. Request declined due to unavailability.
10-Sep-21	Discovery	Covid	Request to interview CMO or CD Emergency Department regarding positive Covid case. Interview declined due to lack of availability, offered to respond to written questions.
10-Sep-21	Stuff	Covid	Request to contact Board Chair regarding Covid positive patient. Written response to questions provided.
12-Sep-21	TVNZ - 1 News	Covid	Request to interview CMO regarding the rise and spread of Covid arrivals at CMDHB. Interview facilitated.
12-Sep-21	Newshub	Covid	Request to interview CMO regarding Covid positive patients in the Emergency Department. Interview facilitated.
12-Sep-21	531pi	Covid	Request to interview CEO regarding Middlemore Hospital Covid cases and messaging for South Auckland public needing hospital level care. Interview facilitated.
14-Sep-21	Breakfast	Covid	Request to interview Clinical Director of the Emergency Department regarding the Emergency Department and Middlemore Hospital before and during a pandemic. Interview facilitated.
15-Sep-21	RNZ	Covid	Request to interview CMO about Covid testing patients in Middlemore as part of Auckland Covid surveillance testing. Interview facilitated.
17-Sep	Newshub	Covid	Request to interview regarding timeline of people presenting to Hospital without being aware they were Covid positive. Declined interview and referred to NRHCC/MoH.
18-Sep-21	Newshub	Covid	Request to conduct weekend interview regarding Rapid Antigen Testing (RAT) at Middlemore Hospital. Request declined and suggested further discussing during the week.
24-Sep-21	Spinoff	Covid - Vaccinations	Request to interview Population Health Director about contingency plans for CMDHB if Auckland only reaches an 80% vaccination rate. Referred to NRHCC and MoH.
28-Sep-21	TVNZ – 1 News	Covid - Vaccinations	Request to interview Board Member regarding vaccine uptake. Referred to NRHCC and MoH
29-Sep-21	Newshub	Covid-Modelling	Request to interview Population Health Director regarding potential scenarios of the Covid outbreak and modelling. Worked with NRHCC Communications team to deliver this.

01-Oct-21	TVNZ	Covid	Request to interview CMO regarding Covid exposure events. Interview declined due to unavailability.
01-Oct-21	Newshub	Covid	Request to interview CMO, CD Emergency Department or Director of Population Health to discuss the latest Covid ED presentations and hospital preparedness. Interview declined due to unavailability.
01-Oct-21	Newshub	Covid	Request to interview CMO or CD Emergency Department regarding the positive cases presenting to hospital. Interview declined due to unavailability.
06-Oct-21	Sunday Q&A	Covid	Covid interview request - facilitated.
15-Oct-21	Maori TV	Covid	Covid interview request - facilitated with CD of Emergency Department.
19-Oct-21	NZ Herald	Covid	Facilitated interview.
20-Oct-21	Maori TV	Covid	Request to interview regarding Covid management. Interview facilitated
21-Oct-21	TVNZ	Covid	Request to interview CMO. Facilitated.
22-Oct-21	Stuff	Covid	Request to interview CMO regarding DHB plans for the surge in Covid-19 cases and messages for the community. Interview planned then changed with a suggested date for facilitation.
01-Nov-21	NZ Herald	Covid-Modelling	Request to interview Population Health Director regarding modelling and assumptions including projected vaccination coverage. Director unavailable at time requested however alternative time offered.
02-Nov-21	Radio NZ	Covid-Modelling	Phone interview request to interview Director Population Health regarding modelling for Auckland over the coming weeks if there is an alert level change. Interview facilitated.
04-Nov-21	TVNZ Breakfast	Covid	Request to interview CEO/CMO regarding staff wellbeing, admission numbers and public messages. Interview facilitated.
07-Nov-21	TVNZ	Covid	Interview request regarding hospital preparedness and forecasted numbers. Facilitated by CMO.
16-Nov-21	Newshub	Covid	Request to phone interview CMO. Facilitated.
17-Nov-21	Newstalk ZB	Covid	Request to interview CMO regarding Covid preparedness media release. Facilitated.
30-Nov-21	TVNZ – 1 News	Covid	Request to interview regarding the effects of Covid-19 to waitlist procedures. Interview facilitated with CD Surgical, Anaesthesia & Perioperative Services.