

9th February 2021

[REDACTED]

Email [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Official Information Act Request for – Staff harassment or assault

I write in response to your Official Information Act request received by us 7th December 2020, you requested the following information:

- **Date/numbers/figures of all incidents involving any DHB staff member (including contractors or casual workers) being harassed or, physically or verbally assaulted by a patient from any ward/area under the DHB's jurisdiction in the last three years to date (07/12/2017 – 07/12/2020).**

Counties Manukau Health Response:

For context, Counties Manukau Health provides health services to more than 570,000 people residing in South Auckland, both in hospitals and community settings. Many of these people requiring our services are acutely unwell and/or in distress when they require this care and that can result in inappropriate behaviours being exhibited, which many of our staff members need to manage and respond to in carrying out their work.

We employ over 7,500 staff, and are constantly working to create a safe work environment for all of them. We are clear that we have zero tolerance for any inappropriate behaviour toward our staff, and encourage the reporting of all such incidents so that they can be fully investigated.

The information we have provided is retrieved from our electronic Incident Reporting System (SafetyFirst). However, there are limitations in the ability to extract concise details for the information you are requesting. The SafetyFirst reporting system is intended to enable staff to report on any incidents in their workplace, and to have these investigated and resolved. This can mean there can be issues with data 'uniformity' and interpretation, and we cannot always directly extract the information across all incidents logged.

Each incident is counted as a unique file, and we use categories to guide the allocation of incidents, along with narrative text that provides extended details however as mentioned above, this is not as easily reported on. While there are classifications for types of incidents reported (e.g. detailing a Specific Incident Type), these may not always be consistently interpreted by everyone.

We have implemented a range of service-specific initiatives in clinical areas of greatest need, including the Emergency Department, Mental Health, and with our security and orderly staff, to further enhance their ability to report, debrief and prevent issues of violence against staff and/or patients. These initiatives include use of CCTV, personal alarms, input from specialist staff, and enhanced training. In addition, we have used social media and other messaging with our wider Counties community about living our CM Health values, and treating others with respect.

We note that this incident report system information should be interpreted with caution. Given the human factor element to logging an incident, differences in reporting systems, and DHB sizes and services, comparisons between DHBs may also be misleading.

- **Date/numbers/figures of all incidents involving any DHB staff member (including contractors or causal workers) being harassed or, physically or verbally assaulted by a patient from any ward/area under the DHB’s jurisdiction in the last three years to date (07/12/2017 – 07/12/2020).**

We cannot easily obtain the information on “victim” versus “perpetrator” of incidents for reporting purposes. This is due to multiple factors of individuals involved in the reporting of the incident. It is not possible to easily distinguish for reporting purposes whether the perpetrator or victim was a patient/s, visitor/s, member/s of the public or employee, to collect the information requested would involve manually searching through the unique file of each incident. Therefore, we are declining this aspect of your request under s.18(f) of the Official Information Act as the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

The data provided in table 1 reflects all incidents logged with the following coding of ‘*Specific Incident Type*’:

- Abuse – Verbal
- Assault – Physical
- Assault – Verbal/Gesture
- Assault - Sexual
- Behaviour – Aggressive/threatening
- Behaviour – Harassment
- Behaviour – Violent
- Harassment
- Hit/bitten/scratched

In addition to the limitations detailed above, it is important to note when interpreting this data that incidents may be reported by more than one staff member from different perspectives or for different reasons e.g. a patient who may have physically assaulted a staff member may have injured themselves in the process and an incident form may have been completed for both the staff member and the patient.

Reported Incidents – 1 st January 2018 to 31 st December 2020	2018	2019	2020	Total
Abuse Verbal	3	5	9	17
Assault - Physical	230	249	280	759
Assault - Verbal/Gesture	58	47	58	163
Assault – Sexual	9	3	9	21
Behaviour - Aggressive/threatening	173	225	215	613
Behaviour - harassment	14	20	21	55
Behaviour - violent	30	45	9	84

Harassment	0	0	2	2
Hit/bitten/scratched	26	31	22	79
Total	543	625	625	1793

Table 1: Data Sourced SafetyFirst System 03/02/2021

Figure 1 below reflects the number of reported incidents per month between 1st January 2018 to 31st December 2020. When interpreting this data it is important to remember that the below reflects reported incidents before investigation.

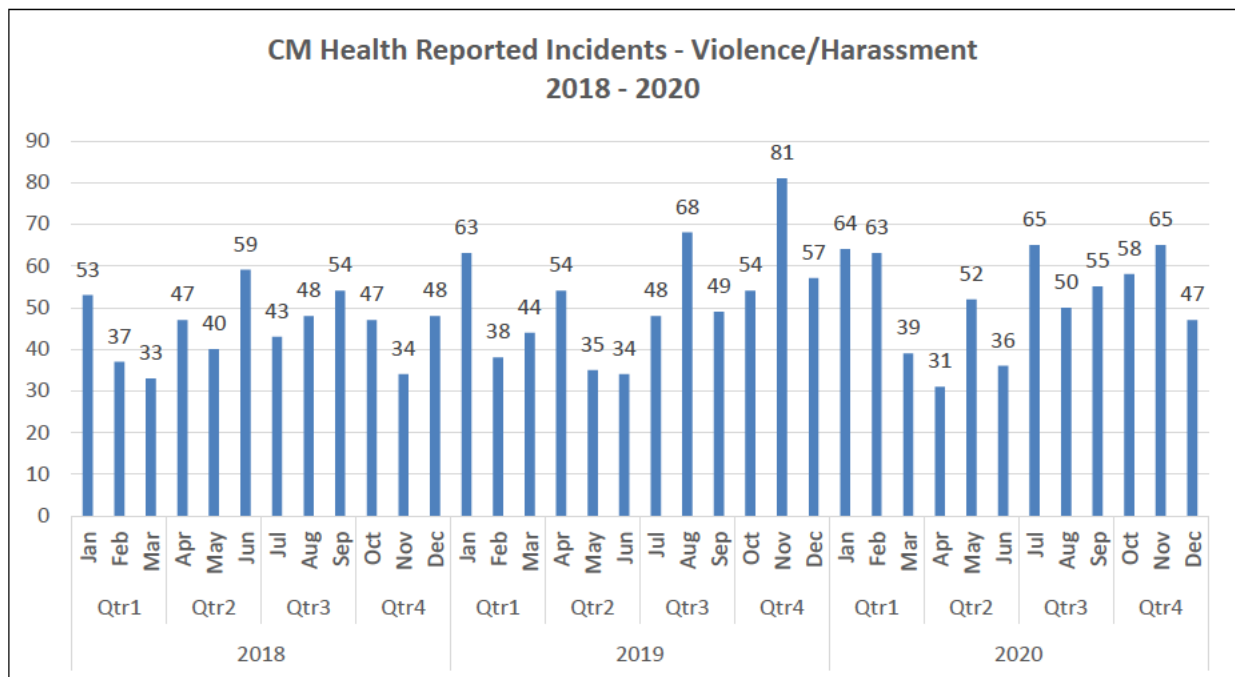


Figure 1: Data Sourced SafetyFirst System 03/02/2021

As of 2018, the CM Health Emergency Department developed a different reporting system (Code Orange) for the logging of violent incidents against staff. The intention of Code Orange is to provide Emergency Department staff with easy means to report all incidents, provide early clinical and de-escalation assistance and ensure staff wellbeing.

Situations that may require a Code Orange call in the Emergency Department have slightly different criteria from the incident reports (and a wider classification), being:

- Intimidating or manipulative behaviour from patient, whaanau or visitor
- Aggressive/intoxicated or suicidal patient / visitor
- Event or behaviour in which staff member feel uncomfortable or compromised
- Unwelcome visitor
- Patients, whaanau or visitors refusing to be sensitive to, or respect the rights of others to privacy
- Extremely stressed patient, whaanau or visitors

Table 2 below reflects the number of reported Code Orange incidents from June 2018 to December 2020.

Code Orange Reported Incidents													
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
2018	-	-	-	-	-	11	21	5	44	50	46	20	197
2019	27	5	17	15	32	23	5	18	11	21	26	29	229
2020	15	25	15	1	15	14	8	9	13	9	3	4	131

Table 2: Data Sourced ED IT Support 13/01/2021

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 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