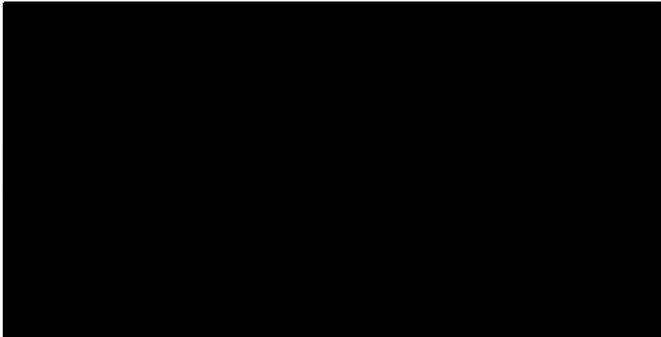


25 May 2021



Re: Official Information Act request – Data on flight nurses employed by Auckland DHB

I refer to your Official Information Act request dated 13 April 2021, requesting the following information:

We would like to request the following information:

1. How many currently registered flight nurses are employed by the DHB?

Auckland DHB provides training for registered nurses who may perform the duties of a flight nurse if required. Currently 30 registered nurses have this training.

2. What is the average remuneration of currently registered flight nurses employed by the DHB by qualification and seniority bands?

All registered nurses are paid according to the NZ Nursing Organisation MECA. This is a public document. There are no additional payments for flight duties, other than overtime and similar arising from the duration of the duty. Under the MECA, rates of pay vary according to the years of experience and level of practice. Flight nurses are generally nurses with many years of intensive care experience and their salary reflects this. The average salary range is \$80 - \$82K excluding penal rates.

3. For each of the last 3 complete financial years, how many flight hours have been charged to the DHB for interhospital transfers by fixed wing aircraft?

Auckland DHB does not collect this information.

4. For each of the last 3 complete financial years, how many flight hours have been charged to the DHB for inter hospital transfers by rotary wing aircraft?

Auckland DHB does not collect this information.

5. For each of the last 3 complete financial years, how much has the DHB spent with third parties for inter hospital transfers by fixed wing aircraft?

The DHB of residence incurs the cost of inter hospital transfers.

Auckland DHB contracts with a third party provider for the delivery of fixed wing services (refer response to question 15) to support national retrieval services, and the costs of this service are billed directly to DHBs for their residents. Auckland DHB does not hold this financial information for other DHBs.

Auckland DHB's population are not high users of inter hospital transfers as most clinical treatments and procedures are available at hospitals close to where residents live. However, Auckland DHB residents who have travelled away from home may require transfer back to Auckland by air transport. This is a very occasional requirement and Auckland DHB does not collect this information in a form that enables us to answer this request accurately.

The following table provides a summary of the total costs to Auckland DHB for its population for both rotary and fixed wing inter hospital transfers over the last three years:

Table 1: Auckland DHB's total spend on inter-hospital flight transfers for the last three financial years

| Financial years | Auckland DHB Total spend – fixed wing and rotary |
|-----------------|---|
| 2017/18 | \$193 168 |
| 2018/19 | \$373 103 |
| 2019/20 | \$238 277 |

The total costs provided include all expenditure relating to inter hospital transfers, including the cost of the air ambulance service provided (rotary or fixed wing), medical and/or nursing staff costs and road transportation to and from airports and hospitals where needed. Most of these costs are paid to third party providers with nursing and medical costs paid to DHBs providing the staff.

6. For each of the last 3 complete financial years, how much has the DHB spent with third parties for inter hospital transfers by rotary wing aircraft?

See response to question 5.

7. For each of the last 3 complete financial years, what is the total number of flights for each destination for inter hospital transfers for fixed wing aircraft?

Auckland DHB does not collect this information.

8. For each of the last 3 complete financial years, what is the total number of flights for each destination for interhospital transfers for rotary wing aircraft?

Auckland DHB does not collect this information.

9. What metrics does the DHB use to measure service performance of service providers providing interhospital transfer services to the DHB for fixed wing aircraft?

Auckland DHB requires regular reporting of a range of metrics as part of the Air Ambulance contract for national retrievals. These metrics include:

- Declined or delayed missions
- Incidents and complaints
- Count of missions, hours and costs

10. What metrics does the DHB use to measure service performance of service providers providing interhospital transfer services to the DHB for rotary wing aircraft?

The National Ambulance Sector Office (NASO) as contract manager is responsible for establishing and reporting the metrics relating to performance of the rotary wing providers. This information is not available to DHBs.

11. What business rules or agreements are in place with other DHBs for cost sharing for interhospital transfers for fixed wing aircraft?

Auckland DHB is the national provider of ECMO (extracorporeal membrane oxygenation for heart-lung support) and PICU (paediatric intensive care unit) and is responsible for the retrieval of these patients from hospitals throughout New Zealand. Auckland DHB has a contract for the provision of fixed wing air ambulance capacity and an agreement with all DHBs to ensure the cost of these services is met by the DHB where the patient usually resides, referred to as the DHB of domicile.

12. What business rules or agreements are in place with other DHBs for cost sharing for interhospital transfers for rotary wing aircraft?

The information provided here has been provided by NASO:

NASO establishes the hourly rate and invoices DHBs for the number of interhospital transfers (IHTs) hours flown. This was first established through a variation to the Crown Funding Agreement.

DHBs are responsible for funding their own IHTs; however, there are two exceptions as follows:

The Ministry of Health pays: for urgent IHTs when a patient is transferred from one medical facility to another within three hours of arriving at the first facility. The exception to this is the Northern Region.

ACC pays: for urgent IHTs when a patient is transferred from one publicly-funded hospital to another within 24 hours and the first hospital is not able to meet patient's needs at that time.

Each month, DHBs are sent a list of IHT missions for patients that are domiciled to their DHB (excluding those where the provider indicates the mission should be covered by ACC for an urgent transfer).

The DHB advises if they accept the cost(s) or whether they should be sent elsewhere i.e. Ministry of Health or another DHB.

13. What advice has the DHB provided to the Simpson Review team relating to patient transfers by aircraft?

Auckland DHB has no record of having provided advice relating to patient transfers by aircraft to the Simpson review.

14. What growth forecasts has the DHB completed or commissioned relating to interhospital transfer demand?

As part of annual planning and on-going contract management discussions with the contracted provider of national service retrievals, Auckland DHB reviews demand trends for national retrievals by fixed wing. During the early stages of the global COVID 19 pandemic, Auckland DHB identified the potential for increased demand for ECMO (Extracorporeal membrane oxygenation) which did not materialise as the country successfully managed to avoid large scale hospitalisations and intensive care demand.

15. Who is the DHB currently under contract with to provide interhospital transfer by aircraft, when does the contract expire and what right of renewals exist within the contract?

Auckland DHB has a contract with New Zealand Air Ambulance (Skyline Aviation) for fixed wing inter-hospital retrievals and transfers. Rights of renewal have been exercised and the current contract is due to expire in June 2024.

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 faithfully



Ailsa Claire, OBE
Chief Executive of Te Toka Tumai (Auckland District Health Board)