

21 December 2021

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

**Re Official Information Request for DHB Media Communications During Delta**

I refer to your official information request dated 06 December 2021 for the following information:

**Under the Official Information Act, please provide information, including but not limited to emails, applications, reports, meeting minutes, memos, data, audiovisual materials and correspondence to/from the DHB about:**

- **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)**
- **Any other instances in which medical staff agreed to talk to the media and they were prevented from doing so by ADHB comms**
- **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.**

#### **Response**

The information you have requested is enclosed below.

#### **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)**

As the NRHCC communications team outlined to you in their media response of the time, the Auckland DHB communications team does not stop or block interviews.

All Senior Medical Officers (SMOs) are entitled to talk to media as part of their Multi Employer Collective Agreement (MECA) agreements in their personal capacity. If talking in their DHB or hospital capacity, this is taken to clinical leadership for their input. Those clinical leaders then make the decision on whether or not an interview occurs – this is not a call that is made by the communications team.

Each request for a clinician to speak on behalf of the DHB is considered on a case by case basis and is dependent on a number of factors including; whether the clinician wants to participate in the interview, whether the clinician is the right spokesperson to speak to the topic, and the capacity of the organisation to facilitate the interview within the journalist's timeframe.

We're 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.

**2) Any other instances in which medical staff agreed to talk to the media and they were prevented from doing so by ADHB comms**

As above, the communications team does not prevent medical staff from talking to the media.

**3) Any communication to/from the media team and the senior management team and executives about requests for interviews during the Delta outbreak.**

Auckland DHB receives approximately 100 media requests per month and any single request may have dozens of communications associated with it. Prior to 1 November 2021, we did not have a process where correspondence regarding media enquiries was saved in one central point – only the finalised responses were saved in a central location.

To source, review and collate these emails we would need to go through the email inboxes and cell phones of more than three dozen members of the communications and senior management teams.

Due to the extensive quantity of this information and its 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.

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 refuse this element of your request under Section 18(f) of the Official Information Act due to substantial collation and research.

From 1 November 2021 we set up a process where communication regarding media requests was copied into Auckland DHB's media inbox. We have provided all relevant communication from here in **Attachment 1**. The other communication about media requests not relevant to your OIA request has been redacted.

I trust this information answers your questions. You have the right to seek an investigation and review by the Ombudsman of this decision. 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 response, may be published on the Auckland DHB website.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret Dotchin". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "Margaret" and the last name "Dotchin" clearly legible. There is a small flourish at the end of the signature.

Margaret Dotchin  
**Acting Chief Executive**