

10th February 2022



Dear 

Official Information Act Request for – Staff Assaults

I write in response to your Official Information Act request received by us 13th December 2021, you requested the following information:

- 1. How many recorded assaults on health staff have there been in 2021?**
- 2. How many recorded incidents of verbal abuse or threats have there been on health staff in 2021?**
- 3. How many days have been lost due to staff taking time off after being assaulted in the same time frame?**

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.

In response to your request, we employ around 8,500 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 in response to your questions 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.

- 1. How many recorded assaults on health staff have there been in 2021?**
- 2. How many recorded incidents of verbal abuse or threats have there been on health staff in 2021?**

The data provided below reflects all incidents logged with the following coding of '*Specific Incident Type*':

- Assault – Physical
- Assault – Verbal/Gesture
- Assault - Sexual

In addition to the limitations previously mentioned, 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 been witnessed by another staff member and an additional incident form may have been completed.

In response to your question, from 1st January 2021 to 31st December 2021 there were 217 reports of assault – physical, verbal/gesture or sexual. Please note, this includes Managed Isolation Facilities in place to support the Covid-19 response. Of the 217 reports, 34 were classed as assault - verbal/gesture. Please note these numbers include all staff who reported an incident with the above specific incident type, it includes both clinical and non-clinical staff including Security.

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

The number of Code Orange reports from 1st January 2021 to 31st December 2021 was 80. There is no way without extensive manual research for us to advise how many of those incidents were reported as assault as their reporting system does not have a method to specify the incident type.

3. How many days have been lost due to staff taking time off after being assaulted in the same time frame?

Our Occupational Health and Safety Service centrally holds data related to *Assault while patient handling*, in 2021 439.055 days were lost.

In relation to other reports, this is individually managed on a case by case basis with the employee and their manager and is not centrally held.

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



Dr Peter Watson
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Counties Manukau Health