



HEALTH & DISABILITY COMMISSIONER
TE TOIHAU HAUORA, HAUĀTANGA

Obstetrician/gynaecologist breached the Code for management of ectopic pregnancy

21HDC00031

In a report published today, Deputy Commissioner Rose Wall found an obstetrician/gynaecologist at Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora breached the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights (the Code) for management of an ectopic pregnancy.

The woman at the centre of the report, underwent a second obstetric ultrasound scan (USS) following episodes of pain and bleeding at six weeks of pregnancy.

An obstetrician and gynaecologist diagnosed the woman with an ectopic pregnancy, suggested conservative management of the condition and briefly mentioned the use of methotrexate 'in passing'.

However, this was not documented in the electronic patient management system and the woman felt concerned that her fallopian tube could rupture. Four days later, the woman underwent surgery for the ectopic pregnancy, which included removal of her right fallopian tube (salpingectomy).

In her decision, Ms Wall found the conservative management plan taken by the clinician was a clinically appropriate option. However, she concluded that insufficient information was provided to the woman to enable her to understand the treatment options available, and their associated risks and benefits.

"Each option (conservative, medical (with the use of methotrexate) or surgical), needed to be explained fully to the woman by the clinician. I do not accept that there was a fulsome discussion, and this is reflected by her complaint to HDC in which the woman indicated that she might not have lost her fallopian tube if the obstetrician/gynaecologist had offered her appropriate and timely treatment."

Ms Wall found the clinician breached Right 6(1) and 7(1) of the Code for failing to provide full information | whakamōhio and failing to enable the woman to make an informed choice and give informed consent | whakaritenga mōu ake.

Ms Wall also found the clinician breached Right 4(2) the Code for inadequate documentation which failed to provide an appropriate standard of care | tautikanga.

"In my view, given the clear standards set out by the Medical Council of New Zealand, the omission to document fell well short of the expectations of a reasonable doctor," Ms Wall said.

“The lack of documentation also resulted in a lack of clarity about what was said during the consultation, which left the woman confused.”

Ms Wall’s report highlighted several issues with district hospital’s systems. This included the wide practice of clinicians giving verbal advice without completing documentation and clinicians using different treatment guidelines from those set out by the district.

Ms Wall was also critical of the lack of discharge summary for the woman’s ED presentation and lack of process to register her patient attendance on its administration system. Finally, she noted that the use of small assessment spaces in ED for early pregnancy complications does not accommodate a patient’s need for privacy and safety.

“Whilst I acknowledge that this process of using small assessment spaces may be due to resource constraints, I am concerned that it places consumers in a vulnerable position,” Ms Wall said.

Since the events the obstetrician/gynaecologist and Health NZ have made changes, outlined in the report. Ms Wall made several further recommendations for both parties.

5 August 2024

Editor’s notes

Please only use the photo provided with this media release. For any questions about the photo, please contact the communications team.

The full report of this case can be viewed on HDC’s website - see HDC's '[Latest Decisions](#)'.

Names have been removed from the report to protect privacy of the individuals involved in this case.

The Commissioner will usually name providers and public hospitals found in breach of the Code unless it would not be in the public interest or would unfairly compromise the privacy interests of an individual provider or a consumer. More information for the media, including HDC’s naming policy and why we don't comment on complaints, can be found on our website [here](#).

HDC promotes and protects the rights of people using health and disability services as set out in the [Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights](#) (the Code).

In 2022/23 HDC made 592 quality improvement recommendations to individual complaints and we have a high compliance rate of around 96%.

Health and disability service users can now access an [animated video](#) to help them understand their health and disability service rights under the Code.

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