

**Financial exploitation by community care worker
(09HDC01375, 17 March 2010)**

*Community healthcare worker ~ Primary health organisation ~ District health board
~ Mental health ~ Community support ~ Financial exploitation ~ Right 2*

A mental health patient complained that her community health care worker had requested and accepted gifts from her that totalled approximately \$55,000. The patient was a vulnerable woman who had issues with trust. The community healthcare worker first became involved with the patient following a referral from the patient's GP for assessment for community support. Initially the patient was reluctant to accept input from the care worker but, over time, they developed a trusting relationship.

The patient alleged that the care worker accepted numerous gifts from her — initially small amounts of money, eg, \$20 or \$30 to help pay for lunches and petrol, but then the gifts included clothes and jewellery. The patient stated that the care worker subsequently began asking for larger sums of money, including \$5,000 on one occasion and \$20,000 on another. The patient also advised that she bought the care worker electronic equipment worth approximately \$2,500 but the order was later cancelled.

The care worker accepted that the value of the money and gifts may have totalled approximately \$55,000. However, she denied ever asking for any of the gifts. She submitted that she was under a lot of stress in her life and felt manipulated by the patient.

The care worker's manager advised that she had been concerned that the care worker was not documenting all of her visits with the patient, and that she was spending too much time with her. The manager maintains that she followed up these concerns with the care worker but that the care worker ignored her emails and telephone messages.

It was held that the care worker inappropriately accepted the gifts and money knowing that the patient was vulnerable and relied heavily on her for support. The care worker was found in breach of Right 2 for abusing the trust placed in her by the patient.

The care worker's manager was also criticised for not taking more assertive action.