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M Smith

Email: fyi-request-23510-571429a2@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H2023029160

Tēnā koe M Smith

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to Manatū Hauora (the Ministry of Health) on 16 July 2023 for information regarding out-of-scope diagnostics, patient notes and general practitioner (GP) responsibilities. Please find a response to each part of your request below:

Which specialists have the authority to diagnose conditions from the DSM-5 such as somatisation syndrome, functional neurological disorder? In other countries, these are predominantly under psychiatry/neurology, but it has come to light that ED physicians, general medicine and gastroenterology specialists are giving these diagnoses without appropriate assessment, and essentially shut patients off from receiving further care and appropriate treatment.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, there is no restriction on which specialty may make the listed diagnoses. There is an expectation that health care providers practice within their scope of practice and consult appropriately with other specialties if they have diagnostic uncertainty. Generalist scopes, including specialist general practitioners, emergency physicians, and general physicians would commonly diagnose and manage patients with functional neurological disorder (FND).

Where a patient considers there has not been appropriate care and treatment, they should raise this with their treating provider, the healthcare facility arranging the treatment, or with Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga Health and Disability Commissioner (HDC). The HDC can be contacted by emailing hdc@hdc.org.nz or by calling freephone 0800 11 22 33. More information can be found on the HDC website here: www.hdc.org.nz.

There are a few information sheets online such as through the Medical council on keeping patient notes, but I cannot find anything regarding the type of language that is appropriate.

Are there any guidelines/policies for recording patient history and assessment? Is this something that is taught at med school, or do new doctors learn from their superiors/colleagues?

Teaching at medical school and ongoing teaching during post graduate training emphasises maintenance of clear and accurate patient records, as described by the Medical Council of New Zealand (MCNZ) here: www.mcnz.org.nz/assets/standards/0c24a75f7b/Maintenance-patient-records.pdf/. Please note, there are no specific guidelines regarding language outside of this standard.

If a patient has been misdiagnosed while in hospital or seeing a public system specialist, what is the protocol for the GP in this situation?

A specialist GP will record current diagnoses in the primary care patient management system. This does not communicate with the secondary care system. Sometimes, it may be appropriate for the GP to write to and notify secondary providers if a diagnosis was subsequently found to be inaccurate or superseded by further symptoms or investigations. There is no protocol for communicating this information.

Are NZ specialists required to decline or ignore a patient's diagnosis from an overseas specialist, even for conditions that are rare and the doctor doesn't have any prior experience in? Any information you have around this would be wonderful.

There is no guidance around ignoring or declining diagnoses from international specialists. Health professionals would take into account any medical investigation, assessment and treatment accessed outside New Zealand. Doctors may not always agree with diagnoses made by other practitioners, both within and outside of Aotearoa New Zealand. In this situation, they may suggest a second opinion, or the patient might request one. Often these complex cases with diagnostic uncertainty would be discussed at multidisciplinary team (MDT) meetings to gain input from several specialists.

I trust this information fulfils your request. If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: oiagr@health.govt.nz.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā



Robyn Shearer
Deputy Chief Executive and Deputy Director-General
Te Pou Mahi Pūnaha | System Performance and Monitoring