

5 March 2025

M.R.M

fyi-request-29475-b53d0d4d@requests.fyi.org.nz

Your request for official information, reference: HNZ00074297

Tēnā koe

Thank you for your email on 19 December 2024, asking Health New Zealand for the following under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act):

1. *How many Waikato Hospital surgeries have been cancelled from the end of September this year to date of you responding to this request?*
2. *How many Waikato Hospital surgeries have been postponed from the end of September this year to date of you responding to this request?*
3. *How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were cancelled in the quarter ending September 2024?*
4. *How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were postponed in the quarter ending September 2024?*
5. *How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were postponed in the quarter ending June 2024?*
6. *How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were cancelled in the quarter ending March 2024?*
7. *How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were postponed in the quarter ending March 2024?*
8. *On or before the abovementioned RNZ news story was published (on 4 December 2024) were letters, e-mails or texts sent to all of the abovementioned, negatively affected, patients advising them that their parathyroidectomy had been cancelled or postponed. If not, why not?*
9. *What are the - full and frank explanation - causes and reasons for the abovementioned cancellations and postponements? Please provide supporting documentary evidence with your response where this is available.*
10. *Is there a national surgery waiting list in New Zealand? If not, why not?*
11. *Why is it the case that some patients are sent to other hospitals - e.g. patients in the Waikato region waiting for surgeries to be done at Hamilton hospital - to get their surgeries done? And, what criteria are used to make these transfer decisions? Please provide supporting documentary evidence with your response where this is available.*
12. *Given that a parathyroidectomy operation takes around 1 hour to complete, and that this does not therefore take a significant amount of resources to get done in fair and reasonable time, how many patients are currently on the Waikato Hospital waiting list for parathyroidectomy surgery? And, what is the longest time that a patient or patients, currently still on a waiting list, has or have been waiting to receive written confirmation from Waikato Hospital of their parathyroidectomy surgery date?*
13. *What responsibility will Health NZ and/or Waikato Hospital take if any parathyroidectomy waiting list patient has worsening symptoms, leading to (the medically peer reviewed and well documented risk of) stroke, heart-attack, coma or death, or, any other long-term, serious, harm caused by cancellation or postponement of their surgery?*

14. *Why are e-mails to Waikato Hospital's "complaints" department not responded to in fair and reasonable time, with not even an acknowledgement of receipt and an undertaking to investigate and respond in fair and reasonable time sent to the complaint?*
15. *Why are phone calls to Waikato Hospitals "complaints" department not responded to by a human being, but instead answered by a tape-recorded voice that suggests complainants leave a message, only to have that message or messages ignored?*

Response

Waikato Hospital has 24 operating theatres and completed approximately **11,500** acute and elective procedures during the 2023-24 financial year.

How many Waikato Hospital surgeries have been cancelled from the end of September this year to date of you responding to this request?

How many Waikato Hospital surgeries have been postponed from the end of September this year to date of you responding to this request?

531 surgeries were rescheduled between 1 October and 19 December 2024. The need to reschedule planned surgery can occur for a range of reasons including unplanned leave (i.e. staff being unwell); the need to prioritise acute and/or emergency procedures; and unexpected delays within theatre (i.e. a prior procedure taking longer than expected). In some instances, procedures also need to be rescheduled because the patient is not available (for example, they may be unwell).

When a procedure does not occur as planned, we endeavour to reschedule the patient as quickly as possible.

How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were cancelled in the quarter ending September 2024?

How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were postponed in the quarter ending September 2024?

How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were cancelled in the quarter ending June 2024?

How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were postponed in the quarter ending June 2024?

How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were cancelled in the quarter ending March 2024?

How many Waikato Hospital parathyroidectomy surgeries were postponed in the quarter ending March 2024?

In total, there were nine parathyroidectomy surgeries rescheduled between 1 January 2024 and 30 September 2024.

More detailed information on the number of patients rescheduled per quarter is unable to be provided, as given the small number of patients, there is the potential for individuals to be identifiable.

Therefore, we are declining to provide numbers less than 5 (<5) pursuant to section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect individual privacy. We have considered whether the public interest in releasing the information outweighs the need to protect the privacy of individual patients and have determined that it does not.

On or before the above mentioned RNZ news story was published (on 4 December 2024) were letters, e-mails or texts sent to all of the abovementioned, negatively affected, patients advising them that their parathyroidectomy had been cancelled or postponed. If not, why not?

It is our standard practice to telephone a patient to advise them that we need to reschedule their procedure rather than send a letter, text or email. This enables us to reschedule the procedure time, if at all possible, at the same time. Following the telephone call, a letter is sent to the patient confirming the new time and date.

What are the - full and frank explanation - causes and reasons for the above-mentioned cancellations and postponements? Please provide supporting documentary evidence with your response where this is available.

We are unable to provide information on the specific causes for the above-mentioned rescheduled procedures, as given the small number of patients, there is the potential for individuals to be identifiable. Therefore, we are declining to provide this information pursuant to section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect individual privacy. We have considered whether the public interest in releasing the information outweighs the need to protect the privacy of individual patients and have determined that it does not.

However, factors that contribute to procedures being rescheduled include unplanned leave (i.e. sick leave); the need to prioritise acute and/or emergency procedures; and unexpected delays within theatre (i.e. a prior procedure taking longer than expected).

Is there a national surgery waiting list in New Zealand? If not, why not?

There is no national surgery waiting list in New Zealand.

Health New Zealand services are provided on a regional basis. Health New Zealand in Waikato operates a surgical waitlist for patients in the district, and for some specialities the wider Te Manawa Taki region, to ensure patients with greatest need are treated as quickly as possible.

Why is it the case that some patients are sent to other hospitals - e.g. patients in the Waikato region waiting for surgeries to be done at Hamilton hospital - to get their surgeries done? And, what criteria are used to make these transfer decisions? Please provide supporting documentary evidence with your response where this is available.

In some instances, Health New Zealand Waikato contracts private facilities to provide surgery to patients. This assists us to reduce waiting times for patients.

This process involves working with the private facilities to determine their capacity to accept patients and the types of patients they can provide care for. Not all patients are able to be treated in a private facility – either because they have risk factors, which require them to have surgery at Waikato Hospital, or the surgical specialty they require is not provided at the private facility.

Patients who can have procedures completed at a private facility are prioritised by wait times and clinical acuity. These processes and criteria are documented and are overseen by the surgical and anesthetic teams that manage, plan and book patients for treatment (please see enclosed documents).

Given that a parathyroidectomy operation takes around 1 hour to complete, and that this does not therefore take a significant amount of resources to get done in fair and reasonable time, how many patients are currently on the Waikato Hospital waiting list for parathyroidectomy surgery? And, what is the longest time that a patient or patients, currently still on a waiting list, has or have been waiting to receive written confirmation from Waikato Hospital of their parathyroidectomy surgery date?

At present, there are 37 patients on the inpatient waitlist.

We are unable to provide information on the longest waiting patient, as there is the potential for them to be identifiable. Therefore, we are declining to provide this information pursuant to section 9(2)(a) of the Act to protect individual privacy. We have considered whether the public interest in releasing the information outweighs the need to protect the privacy of individual patients and have determined that it does not.

What responsibility will Health NZ and/or Waikato Hospital take if any parathyroidectomy waiting list patient has worsening symptoms, leading to (the medically peer reviewed and well documented risk of) stroke, heart-attack, coma or death, or, any other long-term, serious, harm caused by cancellation or postponement of their surgery?

If a patient has worsening symptoms, they are advised to contact their general practitioner to discuss their concerns, or if it is an emergency, patients should attend the emergency department or telephone 111.

When indicated, the patient's general practitioner can contact the service to request that the patient is reviewed and potentially reprioritised for surgery. When a patient is reprioritised, an earlier date for surgery will be provided.

Why are e-mails to Waikato Hospital's "complaints" department not responded to in fair and reasonable time, with not even an acknowledgement of receipt and an undertaking to investigate and respond in fair and reasonable time sent to the complaint?

Health New Zealand Waikato has a policy that sets out the principles, standards and processes for the management of consumer and community feedback. As per the Health and Disability Code of Rights we work to respond to a complaint within 20 working days. It is standard practice to acknowledge complaints within 48-hours.

Why are phone calls to Waikato Hospitals "complaints" department not responded to by a human being, but instead answered by a tape-recorded voice that suggests complainants leave a message, only to have that message or messages ignored?

Health New Zealand Waikato operates an answer service for Feedback & Complaints as the complaints co-ordinator may not always immediately available and works Monday to Friday. When a message is left, the complaints co-ordinator attempts to return phone calls on the same day, wherever possible.

How to get in touch

If you have any questions, you can contact us at hnzOIA@Tewhatoruora.govt.nz.

If you are not happy with this response, you have the right to make a complaint to the Ombudsman. Information about how to do this is available at www.ombudsman.parliament.nz or by phoning 0800 802 602.

As this information may be of interest to other members of the public, Health NZ may proactively release a copy of this response on our website. All requester data, including your name and contact details, will be removed prior to release.

Nāku iti noa, nā



Stephanie Doe
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Waikato District