



West Coast District Health Board

Te Poari Hauora a Rohe o Tai Poutini

Corporate Office
High Street, Greymouth 7840

Telephone 03 769-7400
Fax 03 769-7791

27 November 2020

9(2)(a)

RE Official Information request WCDHB 9486

I refer to your email dated 29 October requesting the information under the Official Information Act from West Coast DHB regarding transfers from Buller Health to Te Nikau Grey Hospital and Health Centre as outlined in the eleven questions below.

Response

As overarching caveats, we note the following in relation to answers given to your questions below:

Data: Previously, data on transfers by mode of transport had been manually collated and included transfers admitted inpatients at Buller Health, as well as those transferred following pre-admission review at Buller Health acute assessment. This particular dataset was discontinued in March 2020 and has not been resurrected, given the administrative time required to compile it when it had little internal use by our organisation.

Only data relating to transfers of admitted inpatients has continued to be captured and tabulated. The data includes helicopter transfers of admitted patients from Buller Health to Te Nikau Grey Hospital regardless of funder, but excludes pre-admission transfers. Data prior to 31 March 2020 is therefore not directly comparable to information that we are able to provide thereafter in answer to your questions below.

As a pre-admission component of transfers is no longer routinely collected with effect from 31 March 2020, we decline to provide the additional information you have requested under Section 18 (f) of the Official Information Act i.e. *"... that the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research."*

Costs: In relation to your questions around costs – West Coast DHB does not hold any information relating to the costs for helicopters, ambulances or motor vehicles that are incurred and paid by other agencies such as St John, ACC, Ministry of Health, or private individuals. We therefore decline to provide the additional information you have requested under Section 18 (g) of the Official Information Act i.e. *"... that the information requested is not held"* by the West Coast DHB.

With these caveats duly noted, please find our responses to your questions overleaf:

1. How many patients were transferred by helicopter from Buller Hospital to Greymouth Hospital each month in the 12 months to June 30, 2020?

Please refer to **Appendix 1** (attached) for data, noting the opening caveat on data above at the opening of our response.

2. What does a helicopter transfer from Buller to Grey cost?

Each helicopter transfer differs in cost, depending upon flight time. The current average cost to the DHB of a helicopter air ambulance flight from Buller to Grey is around \$5,752 per transfer.

3. What were the individual monthly costs of those helicopter transfers for the 12 months to June 30, 2020, who paid (ie individual patients, DHB, ACC, St John) and how much did each of those groups pay in the 12 months?

In the twelve months to 30 June 2020, West Coast DHB paid costs of \$154,556 for helicopter transfers made from Buller Health to Grey Hospital - noting the opening caveat above at the opening of our response declining information in respect of costs incurred by other agencies or individuals, which is information that we do not hold. The data for the DHB costs for using these services is based on invoices received in each month in the year; so is not necessarily matched to transfers that occur within the same month. Costs of transfers that occur in a particular month can often be invoiced in subsequent monthly periods.

West Coast DHB does not operate helicopter services for transfer of people on the West Coast. Independent helicopter operators provide these services. Consequently, West Coast DHB only holds information on costs that it pays the helicopter operators for transfer costs that are incurred by us at request of our clinical staff, for those cases for which we are responsible. From December 2019, the Ministry of Health has paid for medical pre-admission transfers of medical cases that occur under three hours of presentation. ACC pays for inter-hospital transfers that occur within 24 hours of accident for those patients who have an accident-related event. These factors are also applicable to interpretation of cost data in relation to question 8 below; such that helicopter transfer costs paid by West Coast DHB in periods prior to and post-December 2019 are not directly comparable.

A monthly split for helicopter transfer charges based on month of receipt of invoices received and paid by the DHB are included in the table in **Appendix 2** (attached below).

4. How many patients were transferred by ambulance from Buller Hospital to Greymouth Hospital in the same period?

Please refer to **Appendix 1** for data, noting the opening caveat on data above at the opening of our response.

5. What does an ambulance transfer from Buller to Grey cost?

The current average cost to the West Coast DHB for an ambulance transfer from Buller to Grey is \$460 per transfer, and noting the opening caveat above at the opening of our response declining information in respect of costs incurred by other agencies or individuals, which is information that we do not hold.

6. What were the individual monthly costs of those ambulance transfers for the same period, who paid and how much did each group pay in total (a breakdown again please)?

In the twelve months to 30 June 2020, West Coast DHB paid costs of \$20,240 for ambulance transfers made from Buller Health to Grey Hospital - noting the opening caveat above declining information in respect of costs incurred by other agencies or individuals, which is information that we do not hold. The data for the DHB costs for using these services is based on invoices received in each month in the year; so is not necessarily matched to transfers that occur within the same month. Costs of transfers that occur in a particular month can often be invoiced in subsequent monthly periods.

A monthly split for ambulance transfer charges based on month of receipt of invoices received and paid by the DHB are included in table in **Appendix 2** below.

7. How many patients were transferred by helicopter from Buller Hospital to Greymouth Hospital for the periods: July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019; July 1, 2020 to October 31, 2020; July 1, 2019 to October 31, 2019?

Please refer to **Appendix 1** for data, noting the opening caveat on data above at the opening of our response.

8. What were the individual monthly costs of those transfers, who paid and how much did each group pay for each period (ie for the 12 months to June 30, 2019, the five months to October 31, 2020, and the five months to October 31, 2019?)

Please refer to **Appendix 2** for invoiced costs as incurred and paid by West Coast DHB; and noting the opening caveat above at the opening of our response declining information in respect of costs incurred by other agencies or individuals, which is information that we do not hold.

As outlined for your similar question 3 above, data for the DHB costs for using these services is based on invoices received in each month in the year; so is not necessarily matched to transfers that occur within the same month. Costs of transfers that occur in a particular month can often be invoiced in subsequent monthly periods. As also noted in answer to question 3 above, helicopter transfer costs paid by West Coast DHB in periods prior to and post-December 2019 are not directly comparable, due to the change in a component funding of these services.

Invoices for services in October 2020 have yet to be received and verified, so data is not available at this time.

9. How many patients were transferred by ambulance from Buller Hospital to Greymouth Hospital for the periods: July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019; July 1, 2020 to October 31, 2020; July 1, 2019 to October 31, 2019?

Please refer to **Appendix 1** for data, noting the opening caveat on data above at the opening of our response.

10. What were the individual monthly costs of those transfers, who paid and how much did each group pay for each period (ie the 12 months to June 30, 2019, the five months to October 31, 2020 and the five months to October 31, 2019)?

Please refer to **Appendix 2** for costs as incurred by West Coast DHB; and noting the opening caveat on costs above at the opening of our response declining information in respect of costs incurred by other agencies or individuals, which is information that we do not hold.

Invoices for services in October 2020 have yet to be received and verified, so data is not available at this time.

11. How many patients were transferred from Buller Hospital to Greymouth Hospital by DHB car in each of the time periods provided above, what did those car transfers cost for each time period, who paid (ie patients, DHB, St John, ACC) and how much did each of those groups pay?

Please refer to **Appendix 1** for data on the number of transfers made by car, noting the opening caveats on data above at the opening of our response.

It is not possible to provide data on the cost of car transfers as requested. Where transfer is undertaken by DHB car, the DHB covers any associated costs such as vehicle running costs and staffing within wider budget centre costs. Moreover, these expenses are not individualized or fully costed by trip, so it is not possible to determine the transfer costs for all patient transfers at individual level. Additionally, in some cases where clinically appropriate, patients may be transferred by car in co-share of a vehicle that is already travelling to Greymouth for other purposes. As such, the information requested on cost of car transfers cannot be made available without substantial additional cost,

collation and research. We therefore decline to provide additional information you have requested under Section 18 (f) of the Official Information Act i.e. *"... that the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research."*

We note the opening caveat on costs above at the opening of our response, declining information in respect of costs incurred by other agencies or individuals, which is information that we do not hold.

I trust this satisfies your interest in this matter.

You may, under section 28(3) of the Official Information Act, seek a review of our decision to withhold information by the Ombudsman. 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 response, may be published on the West Coast DHB website after your receipt of this response.

Yours sincerely



Ralph La Salle
Acting Executive Director
Planning, Funding & Decision Support

Appendix 1: Transfers of admitted Patients, from Buller Health to Grey Hospital

Part 1 - Transfers of Admitted Patients and of Pre-Admission Cases from Buller Health to 31 March 2020 (Regardless of Service Funder)

Transfers from Buller Health To Grey Hospital: 2018	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18
Ambulance	6	6	2	4	4	4
Helicopter	1	8	13	17	5	8
Hospital Board Car	5	6	1	3	4	6
Private Motor Vehicle	6	5	6	4	3	2
Grand Total	18	25	22	28	16	20

Transfers from Buller Health To Grey Hospital: 2019	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Ambulance	6	2	4	6	10	7	10	9	6	6	5	10
Helicopter	6	7	1	4	5	11	9	9	6	3	7	10
Hospital Board Car	6	6	7	3	5	5	5	4	5	4	6	3
Private Motor Vehicle	5	3	2	5	4	4	6	8	3	4	3	3
Grand Total	23	18	14	18	24	27	30	30	20	17	21	26

Transfers from Buller Health To Grey Hospital: 2020	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20
Ambulance	10	17	8
Helicopter	11	1	3
Hospital Board Car	7	7	4
Private Motor Vehicle	7	3	4
Grand Total	35	28	19

Part 2 - Transfers of Admitted Patients Only from Buller Health After 31 March 2020 (Regardless of Service Funder)

Transfers from Buller Health To Grey Hospital: 2020	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20
Ambulance	2	5	8	8	3	2	4
Helicopter	1	2	1	0	1	0	0
Hospital Board Car	3	3	4	1	1	0	1
Private Motor Vehicle	0	1	1	1	2	0	1
Grand Total	6	11	14	10	7	2	6

Appendix 2: Costs to West Cost DHB of Transfers of admitted Patients, from Buller Health to Grey Hospital

Costs to DHB of Transfers of admitted Patients, from Buller Health to Grey Hospital: 2018	Jul-18	Aug-18	Sep-18	Oct-18	Nov-18	Dec-18
Ambulance	\$920	\$920	\$920	\$920	\$920	\$920
Helicopter	\$10,188	\$13,584	\$13,584	\$37,356	\$16,980	\$16,980

Costs to DHB of Transfers of admitted Patients, from Buller Health to Grey Hospital: 2019	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Ambulance	\$460	\$460	\$920	\$920	\$1,380	\$920	\$1,380	\$1,840	\$2,300	\$1,380	\$2,300	\$2,760
Helicopter	\$26,062	\$21,820	\$21,820	\$24,850	\$27,275	\$40,609	\$27,881	\$32,123	\$21,820	\$16,971	\$11,516	\$27,275

Costs to DHB of Transfers of admitted Patients, from Buller Health to Grey Hospital: 2020	Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20
Ambulance	\$1,380	\$2,300	\$460	\$1,840	\$1,380	\$920	\$1,070	\$1,380	\$0	n/a
Helicopter	\$10,910	\$0	\$6,061	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	n/a