

22 January 2019

Thank you for your request dated 10 December 2018 requesting information under the Official Information Act 1982, regarding the use of smart phones and applications. You requested:

1. *“Does the DHB have a policy in place regarding the use of smartphones/smartphone apps like WhatsApp, Snapchat, Messenger for the recording and sharing of clinical information?”*
2. *If yes, what is the policy? If no, why not?*
3. *How frequently would you say this is happening among clinicians?*
4. *Is it just a sign of the times; a more efficient way of sharing information?*
5. *What efforts are made to ensure patient privacy if/when sharing information through personal/work smartphones?*
6. *Have any clinicians been reprimanded for the way they have used their smartphone/tablet to record or share patient information?*

The information pertaining to your request is below.

#### **Questions 1 & 2:**

*“Does the DHB have a policy in place regarding the use of smartphones/smartphone apps like WhatsApp, Snapchat, Messenger for the recording and sharing of clinical information?”*

*“If yes, what is the policy? If no, why not?”*

Hutt Valley DHB takes patient privacy and information security very seriously. We have a mobile devices policy which places the obligation on staff to use smart devices and apps in accordance with our policy. Our mobile devices policy does not specifically refer to cloud-based messaging applications such as WhatsApp, Snapchat, and Messenger, but it outlines rules for acceptable use and reminds our clinicians to act in accordance with the principles and the spirit of the Health Information Privacy Code. This policy applies to personal and work smartphones.

The DHB also has a clinical photography policy that sets guidelines obtaining informed consent, recording, and secure storage of clinical images captured on smart devices.

We continue to audit and review our controls, policies, and the use of smartphone devices to ensure that our patients' information is secure. We regularly review our policies in light of new developments in technology and applications, and will continue to do so.

#### **Question 3 & 4:**

*“How frequently would you say this is happening among clinicians?”*

*“Is it just a sign of the times; a more efficient way of sharing information?”*

We use specialised tools for ordering diagnostics and assigning clinical tasks. We have not surveyed the use of cloud messaging applications such as WhatsApp, and do not have figures on the frequency of use of these applications. In response to your inquiry, we have sought feedback from our clinicians and have found a few reported examples of WhatsApp's use in clinical settings. Tools like WhatsApp have been used for communicating and coordinating within health care teams. Most of the communications reported back to us relate to clinical teams coordinating their activities such as letting the team know the location of a specific clinician, or that a meeting is on, or that a particular

patient has now been discharged. Where there is reference to a patient, this may include a patient's name or NHI.

**Question 5:**

*“What efforts are made to ensure patient privacy if/when sharing information through personal/work smartphones?”*

We continue to audit and review our controls, policies, and the use of smartphone devices to ensure that our patients' information is secure. We regularly review our policies in light of new developments in technology and applications, and will continue to do so.

**Question 6:**

*“Have any clinicians been reprimanded for the way they have used their smartphone/tablet to record or share patient information?”*

We have not formally reprimanded any clinician for sharing or recording patient information on a smartphone or tablet device.