

**Management of patient with elevated HbA1c levels**  
**16HDC01577, 23 June 2017**

*General practitioner ~ Natural health clinic ~ Follow-up of abnormal test results ~  
Diabetes ~ Information ~ Communication ~ Standard of care ~ Rights 4(1), 4(2), 6(1)*

A 37-year-old woman had been consulting with a general practitioner (GP) at a natural health clinic for management of her hypothyroidism, but remained enrolled with another GP for her other health needs (“enrolled GP”).

The GP at the natural health clinic ordered four sets of blood tests over a period of 14 months. On all occasions, abnormal HbA1c results were returned. The GP did not communicate these results to the woman’s enrolled GP, and, after advising the woman to make lifestyle changes following the first elevated HbA1c result, did not take any action on two subsequent results. The last result, which showed a significant change in HbA1c level, was not communicated to the woman in a timely manner as the GP had not reviewed it in the two days prior to going overseas for three days.

The day before the GP returned, the woman mentioned to the GP that she was feeling generally ill, and complained of a number of symptoms, including increased “cloudiness”, perpetual thirst, and unexpected weight loss. The woman spoke with the GP the next day and mentioned that she had been passing excessive urine and had painful flanks. The GP told the woman of the change in the HbA1c level and advised her to consult with her enrolled GP within the week. On the following day, the woman was admitted to hospital, where she was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes.

**Findings**

It was held that the GP breached Right 6(1) by failing to inform the woman about the series of abnormal HbA1c results and their significance, including advice about lifestyle changes, and breached Right 4(2) by failing to communicate with the woman’s enrolled GP. It was also held that the GP breached Right 4(1) for her deficient management of the woman, in light of her reported symptoms and significant change in HbA1c level.

It was held that the natural health clinic breached Right 4(1) by not implementing any measures to handle its increased workload at that time, failing to arrange for another health professional to process test results over the period that its GP was overseas, and by not having a system in place to ensure that patients’ GPs were advised of test results and the treatments provided.

**Recommendations**

It was recommended that the GP arrange for a peer to audit all blood test results received within the last month, with focus on appropriate follow-up of abnormal results and communication with principal health providers; undertake further training on the diagnosis and management of diabetes; and apologise in writing to the woman.

It was recommended that the Medical Council of New Zealand consider whether a review of the GP’s competence is warranted.

It was recommended that the natural health clinic develop a written policy for the management of test results, and update the questionnaire provided to new patients to indicate that results and consultation notes (including prescriptions) will be provided to their usual GP unless the patient withholds consent.