



Health and Disability Commissioner
Te Toihau Hauora, Hauātanga

**Hato Hone St John breaches Code for
not providing services of an appropriate standard**

21HDC01118

The Deputy Health and Disability Commissioner has found Hato Hone St John breached the Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights for failures in assessing a man with a suspected heart attack, and contradicting a GP's advice.

Dr Vanessa Caldwell found the organisation breached Right 4(2) of the Code which provides people the right to services of an appropriate standard that comply with legal, professional and ethical standards.

The man was contacted by his GP after tests confirmed elevated troponin levels, which can indicate a heart attack. As the man lived approximately 90 minutes from the hospital, and the GP was concerned about possible deterioration in his condition en route, the GP advised the man to call for an ambulance to take him to hospital immediately.

At the 111 call centre, the man's condition was initially triaged as being potentially serious but not immediately life-threatening and a first response team was sent. An ambulance arrived just over an hour after the first response team to take over the man's care. After discussion, it was decided that the man's wife would drive him to hospital, where he was admitted and then referred to the critical care unit and found to have experienced a heart attack.

Dr Caldwell said, "I am concerned that attending St John staff failed to recognise the seriousness of the man's condition and ensure he was assessed fully prior to leaving the scene, when he was not to be transported by ambulance..."

"Further, the team's decision to support the man to self-drive to hospital was in direct contradiction of the man's GP who had directed him to go by ambulance even if he was not in pain. Without undertaking their own assessments and knowing the urgency of the referral from the GP, I am critical that this decision was supported contrary to another health professional's directions."

Dr Caldwell added that a lack of documentation by Hato Hone St John led to confusion about which team performed the assessments and what was assessed.

Dr Caldwell was critical about a St John officer's lack of appropriate care of the man and the call handler for minimising the clinical advice of the man's doctor to use an ambulance.

Hato Hone St John has told HDC that education and guidance continues to be given to its ambulance staff on using its clinical procedures and guidelines, clinical

bulletins, and education material about the need for complete and accurate documentation.

18 March 2024

Editor's notes

The full report of this case will be available on HDC's [website](#). Names have been removed from the report to protect privacy of the individuals involved in this case.

The Commissioner will usually name providers and public hospitals found in breach of the Code, unless it would not be in the public interest, or would unfairly compromise the privacy interests of an individual provider or a consumer.

More information for the media, including HDC's naming policy and why we don't comment on complaints, can be found on our website [here](#).

HDC promotes and protects the rights of people using health and disability services as set out in the [Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights](#) (the Code).

In 2021/22 HDC made 402 recommendations for quality improvement and providers complied with 98% of those recommendation.

Learn more: [Education](#)

Health and disability service users can now access an [online animation](#) to help them understand their health and disability service rights under the Code.