



**TE MARAE ORA**  
MINISTRY OF HEALTH  
**COOK ISLANDS**

# **PATIENT REFERRAL POLICY**

## **2026**

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## RATIONALE

The Patient Referral Policy ultimately provides objectives and guidelines for the transfer of patients within the Cook Islands and overseas.

Section 13 of the Ministry of Health Act 2013 (“the Act”) authorises the Ministry of Health (“the Ministry”) to manage and implement schemes for the referral of eligible patients for treatment within the Cook Islands or for specialised treatment outside the Cook Islands.

Section 13(4) sets out the grounds for eligibility for approved schemes for the referral of patients.

Section 8 of the Act sets out the responsibilities and powers of the Head of Ministry to develop rules, operating procedures and guidelines in accordance with the Act.

Section 7 of the Act provides the Ministry with general powers to provide health services including the requirement relating to payment or reimbursement of costs of such services by the patient under section 7(3).

Section 33(1) of the Act authorises the creation of forms for use by the Ministry in administering its functions.

## OBJECTIVES

1. Comprehensive, high quality, and responsive Patient referral systems by:
  - a. Establishing a clear Terms of Reference for the functions of the Patient Referral Committee; and
  - b. Periodically updating clinical guidelines, eligibility criteria and standard forms for transferring patients within the Cook Islands and to Public Hospitals in New Zealand.
2. Provide regular clinical audits, patient satisfaction surveys to guide improvements in the Patient Referral System.

## SCOPE

This policy **ONLY** applies to:

- All Resident Cook Islanders, Permanently Returning Cook Islanders and family<sup>1</sup> (with MFAI Passport Stamp), Permanent Resident Certificate holders; and Contract Expatriate Workers who have completed a minimum 6 months continuous employment<sup>2</sup> in the Cook Islands;
  - i. Who have been registered in the Te Marae Ora Ministry of Health (TMO) patient information system; and have been
  - ii. Approved under this criteria by the Secretary of Health (SOH) and the Patient Referral Committee including but not limited to specialist private referral, approved self-referral, or approved follow-up specialist treatments.

**Note:** Anyone who does not have New Zealand Citizenship and is a holder of a foreign Passport **DOES NOT** qualify for free health services in New Zealand. The patient will be liable for all medical, hospital and personal costs (accommodation, transport, pharmaceuticals, laboratory tests, meals, etc.) in New Zealand or in another country (the patient's home country) to which the patient can be referred. TMO may fund a one-way or a return airfare from Rarotonga to another country at the discretion of the SOH.

This policy **DOES NOT** cover:

- Non-Cook Islanders on work permits or any other temporary permit holders working and residing in the Cook Islands and their children and/or relatives for a period of less than 6 months<sup>3</sup>.
- Visitors and tourists to the Cook Islands; and
- Cook Islanders permanently residing overseas.

Patients in this category will be expected to cover **ALL** health care costs incurred.

TMO will be responsible for one follow up referral for the same condition. If the patient is required for more than one follow-up that cannot be provided in the Cook Islands, approval may be granted at the discretion of the SOH in consultation with the referral committee.

The patient may meet all costs or on a cost-sharing basis<sup>4</sup> (50/50) for further follow-up care and management of the same condition.

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<sup>1</sup> Stand down 6 months with SOH discretion depending on the situation

<sup>2</sup> Employer should provide proof of the worker's confirmation of continuous employment

<sup>3</sup> Exceptions apply for those residing for more than six months of continuous employment.

<sup>4</sup> Only applies to Cook Islanders, Permanent Residence Certificate holders, and with New Zealand passport holders.

## PATIENT REFERRAL COMMITTEE

### 1. Core Membership

- a. The Accepting Doctor at the Rarotonga Hospital
- b. Chief Medical Officer
- c. Chief Nursing Officer
- d. Director of Hospital Health Services
- e. Manager Finance
- f. Patient Referral Coordinator;
- g. Director of Primary Health Care; and
- h. Director of Oral Health

### 2. Addendum to membership

- a. Health Specialists
- b. Air New Zealand MEDA
- c. New Zealand Patient Referral Officer or delegated authority

## POLICY COVER

1. Costs covered under this policy extend only to patients who have met the criteria set out above under the **SCOPE** of this Policy regarding the following:
  - Pa Enea domestic referral;
  - Referral to a Public Hospital or Private Clinics in Auckland or as approved by the SOH in New Zealand as international referral; or
  - Referral to another country approved by the SOH in consultation with the Patient Referral Committee.
  - a) Patient return airfares/sea passage costs, including oxygen, stretcher, airline callout fees and ambulance costs (where applicable), **EXCEPT** in the case of alcohol related referrals.
  - b) All referral arranged privately by the patient, their private GPs, or patients who feel ill during their private overseas visit, who did not go through TMO, shall not be covered under this policy. However, special consideration may be granted by the SOH in consultation from the referral committee.
2. The Ministry will source the most economical airfares/sea passage for travel.
3. For ease and efficient transfer from Auckland International Airport to a public hospital in Auckland, New Zealand:
  - No Duty free allowance is permitted for all referred patients and medical escort(s).
  - No food or other product that may attract biosecurity clearance is permitted. This will help speed their transit through customs and to hospital services in New Zealand.
  - It is recommended that minimal personal luggage is taken with the patient at the time of referral. Any extra luggage required by the patient is the responsibility of the next of kin.

This is to ensure that if a referred patient requires an escort (as per meda form) then they are considered to be medically unwell and too sick to travel unaccompanied.

- All patients referred must return within three (3) months of being discharged and medically cleared. Should the patient decide to stay on, TMO support will stop at end of the three (3) months period.

Section 13(4) of the Ministry of Health Act 2013 confers on the Ministry of Health the power to "... impose criteria or restrictions, or impose obligations to reimburse the expenses incurred..."

Section 13(4)(c) goes on to state " the extent to which the patient contributed to the need for the referral by abuse of drugs or ALCOHOL, or any illegal behaviour"

**No one will be denied access to medical services due to alcohol related incidents.**

All patients will be facilitated for referral by TMO to minimise further health complications for the patient. However all arrangements for repayment of costs will be made prior to departure, except for emergency cases, and must be signed off by either the patient and/or nominated next of kin.

Re-payment schedules can also be arranged.

## **REFERRALS**

### **ALCOHOL RELATED REFERRALS**

- 50% of Chartered Flight cost and/or flight diversion cost for emergency domestic transfers including Air Ambulance Services.
- Full payment of Rarotonga Hospital User Charges.
- The patient is liable to meet 50% of one way airfare Rarotonga/Auckland for the patient and medical and/or nurse escort(s), oxygen, ambulance transfers on Rarotonga and Auckland, New Zealand, Airline Call Out Fees and a daily allowance of \$200 for medical and/or nurse escort(s) which must be paid prior to departure.
- Patients and/or their nominated next of kin must meet all costs.

### **Special Criteria apply to the following patients:**

#### **Patients 16 years**

Patients (16) years, including any student attending school up to 18 years old and under may be accompanied by one (1) family member. The family member must be able to make decisions on behalf of the child (i.e. parent, uncle, aunty or grandparent).

#### **Patient 65 years**

Patients (65) years and over may be accompanied by one (1) family member. The family member must be able to make decisions on behalf of the patient (i.e. spouse or next of kin).

#### **Dependent Child or Infant**

Dependent child or infant (up to 4 years) may accompany the patient including a twin of another sick twin baby up to four (4) years of age be allowed to travel with the mother.

### **Pa Enuā Referrals**

An accommodation allowance for Pa Enuā referrals to Rarotonga may be approved by the Referral Committee.

### **Infirm and destitute Patients**

Return air and/or sea fare for the patient plus one accompanying nominated family member who must be able to make decisions on behalf of the patient (i.e. spouse, parent, uncle or aunty or grandparent).

### **Chronic Disability**

Return air and/or sea fare for the patient and may be accompanied by a family member upon the referring doctor verifying the need for an escort.

## **DOMESTIC TRANSFERS**

The Patient is considered for referral for further secondary or tertiary treatment or care, and approved elective surgery at the Rarotonga Hospital or Oral Health Services in Tupapa provided the patient is eligible under the scope of the Policy.

### **Special Criteria apply to the following patients:**

#### **Patients 16 years**

Patients (16) years, including any student attending school up to 18 years old and under may be accompanied by a nominated family member. The family member must be able to make decisions on behalf of the child (i.e. parent, uncle, aunty or grandparent).

#### **Patient 65 years**

Patients (65) years and over may be accompanied by one (1) family member. The family member must be able to make decisions on behalf of the patient (i.e. spouse or next of kin).

#### **Dependent Child or Infant**

Dependent child or infant (up to 4 years) may accompany the patient including a twin of another sick twin baby up to four (4) years of age be allowed to travel with the mother.

#### **Infirm and destitute Patients**

Return air and/or sea passage for the patient and a nominated accompanying family member who must be able to make decisions on behalf of the patient (i.e. spouse, parent, uncle or aunty or grandparent) will be booked.

#### **Chronic Disability**

Return air and/or sea passage for the patient and may be accompanied by a nominated family member upon the referring doctor verifying the need for an escort.

#### **Alcohol related motor vehicle crash or incident**

The patient who caused the crash if required to be referred must make arrangements to pay fifty percent (50%) of all travel related costs including inpatient hospital fees at the Rarotonga

Hospital. The same applies to any person who while under the influence of drugs or alcohol is involved in any incident or accident that may require referral to Rarotonga.

A police and medical report will be used to determine when a person is under the influence of alcohol. Where a laboratory test is not available, the “MANSEEMSFUL” test will be used.

If the Patient was not directly responsible for the motor vehicle crash then the recovery for costs becomes a civil case. A medical report will be made available to the patient at a cost to facilitate their claim and TMO must also provide Crown Law Office and the Cook Islands Police Prosecution with a copy of cost incurred for recovery.

### **Pa Eua Referrals**

An accommodation allowance of \$20 per day for Pa Eua referrals to Rarotonga may be approved by the Referral Committee.

## **Referral Process**

### **1. Activation of the Patient Referral process is as follows:**

- a. The Officer In-Charge on the island consults with the Accepting Officer, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) or the Director at the Rarotonga Hospital or Oral Health and present the history, clinical findings, diagnosis and reason for referral;
- b. Based on the clinical presentation and clarifications, the Accepting Officer the CMO/Director activates the referral of patient;
- c. The Referring Doctor/Officer In-Charge informs the patient of the referral, process the referral form and referral letter. All documentation to be emailed to the Patient Referral Coordinator;
- d. The CMO/Director Hospital Health Services/Director of Oral Health to inform the Accepting Officer of the referral and all requirements in transferring the patient safely to Rarotonga;
- e. The Patient Referral Coordinator proceeds with the necessary logistics and ensure that documentation is scanned and emailed as appropriate; and
- f. Final approval is obtained from the Secretary of Health.

**Officer In-Charge:** The Referring Doctor, Nurse Practitioner or Registered Nurse is the Officer In-Charge of the health facility in the Outer Islands who has confirmed the case for further management in Rarotonga.

**Accepting Officer at Rarotonga Hospital/Oral Health:** Acceptance by the Medical Consultant who will manage the case on Rarotonga.

Special circumstances for **URGENT** referrals include ‘verbal or by text message’ approval being obtained from the Secretary of Health or Director Acting in the absence of the Secretary of Health, with written approval being obtained on the first working day from the Patient Referral Committee.

## Medical and/or Nurse Escorts

- a. Medical or nursing escort(s) will be required from time to time to escort a patient as recommended by the Referring Doctor/ Accepting doctor in consultation with the approval of the Patient Referral Committee.
- b. All Medical or Nursing escort(s) must hold current annual practising certificates and advanced life support certificates.
- c. All Medical or Nursing escort(s) must provide safe and appropriate health care services for patients during the transfer.
- d. In most instances, medical/nursing escort(s) will be provided from the staff pool on Rarotonga. However, in rare cases, nurses or doctors from the Pa Enea will be required to accompany the patient to Rarotonga.
- e. A daily per diem as outlined in the latest HR Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual must be payable for Medical and/or Nurse Escort(s) from the Pa Enea. If the return flight is not on the same working day, the prescribed daily per diem is payable and supporting documentation must be attached.
- f. Any medical or nursing escorts for private referrals under health insurance schemes from Pa Enea will be paid of \$350.

## Administrative Process

### 1. Administrative process when referral is activated:

- i. **Officer In-Charge:**
  - a. Complete correct Patient Referral form;
  - b. Organise signing of Patient Consent form;
  - c. Advise the patient/s to take their passport and birth certificate in the event they are further referred to NZ for further management and;
  - d. Prepares referral letter to Accepting Officer.
- ii. **Accepting Doctor:**
  - a. Informs the Patient Referral Committee and Patient Referral Coordinator to initiate travel arrangements;
  - b. Inform Charge nurse, Outpatient Emergency Department and ward(s) of the referral case;
  - c. Inform Chief Medical Officer (“CMO”) and Chief Nursing Officer (“CNO”) or the Director of Hospital, or Oral Health for escort if required.
- iii. **Patient Referral Coordinator:**
  - a. Coordinates travel arrangement (Air Rarotonga airfare/charter or sea passage), including ambulance services;
  - b. Ensures the CMO or the CNO have appropriate escort identified as required;
  - c. Send completed Patient Referral form to Secretary of Health for final approval;
  - d. Inform the ambulance drivers and Outpatient Emergency Department Charge Nurse of the actual arrival time of referred patient at the airport for pick up and;
  - e. Monitor and maintain database of all patient referrals;
  - f. Liaise with patient for accommodation allowance once discharged as an in-patient from the hospital while waiting return back to the island or if an out-patient as approved by the Accepting Doctor.

**iv. Finance Officer:**

Activates payment of air/sea fares/accommodation allowance upon receipt of:

- a. Invoice;
- b. Completed and authorised Patient Referral Form;
- c. Completed and authorised works order;
- d. Complete FMIS payment

Activates disbursement of medical escort cash float upon receipt of:

- a. Completed expenditure summary;
- b. Completed and authorised Patient Referral form;
- c. Medical escort e-ticket;
- d. Medical escort boarding pass;

**v. Activates direct payment of medical escort allowance to medical escort, In the event that there is insufficient funds in the medical escort cash float at time of referral:**

- a. Letter of request from Patient Referral Coordinator;
- b. Completed and authorised Patient Referral form;
- c. Medical escort e-ticket;
- d. Medical escort boarding pass (to be submitted on return);

**Activates reimbursements for referred patients, in the event that the patient meets the fare at their own cost:**

- a. Letter of recommendation from referral doctor;
- b. Approval from HOM;
- c. Completed and authorised Patient Referral form;
- d. Patient e-ticket;
- e. Complete FMIS payment.

Special circumstances for **URGENT** referrals include 'verbal or text message' approval being obtained at short notice, with the written approval process being obtained as soon as possible afterwards from the Secretary of Health.

**2. Administrative process for Repatriation:**

**i. Accepting Officer:**

- a. Provides discharge summary once discharge from the Hospital;
- b. Provide medical clearance to Patient/Next of Kin once all follow up appointments have been completed; and
- c. Inform Patient Referral Coordinator at Rarotonga Hospital that patient is cleared to travel back to island the patient was referred from.

**ii. Patient Referral Coordinator:**

- a. Contacts Patient/Next of Kin to confirm travel arrangements;
- b. Arranges air/sea fare for the patient;
- c. Forward all documentation to Finance for payment;
- d. Completes filing for each referral;
- e. Ensures all data is entered on MedTech.
- f. Liaise with patient or escort for accommodation allowance if an in-patient upon discharge from hospital or as an out-patient as approved by the Accepting Officer.
- g. Ensure that patient returns back to his/her island as soon as possible upon discharge.

iii. **Finance Officer**

Activates payment of air/sea fares upon receipt of:

- a. Invoice;
- b. Completed and authorised Patient Referral Form;
- c. Death Certificate (where applicable);
- d. Discharge summary from Accepting doctor;
- e. Completed and authorised works order;
- f. Complete FMIS payment.

**Activates reimbursements for referred patients, in the event that the patient meets the fare at their own cost:**

- a. Letter of recommendation from referral doctor;
- b. Approval from HOM;
- c. Completed and authorised Patient Referral form;
- d. Death Certificate (where applicable);
- e. Discharge summary from Accepting doctor;
- f. Patient e-ticket;
- g. Complete FMIS payment.

**Note:** Patients who are not discharged and/or have not received medical clearance and choose to travel back to their island of residence must meet their own cost of travel. Should they fall ill for the same medical condition TMO will not meet the transfer cost of the patient. TMO will only be liable for their final repatriation upon receipt of a discharge summary or medical clearance from the Accepting Officer or for urgent situations requiring their return, subject to the approval of the SOH.

**Deceased Patients**

1. TMO will fund the cost of returning the deceased (including family escort under the special criteria) back to the island they were referred from by way of cargo only (freight of human remains).
2. A copy of the Death Certificate and the Airway bill must be presented to the TMO Patient Referral Coordinator at Rarotonga Hospital before the payment for freight of human remains can be processed.

**Change in patient management**

1. A patient refusal form must be signed by the patient **IF** a patient declines health care services and advice provided by the Accepting Officer after arrival in Rarotonga. All further health care costs including return air/ sea fare for the Patient and/or family escort, will be met by the patient and/or Next of Kin.
2. All patients who decline medical treatment once referred to Rarotonga will not be covered by this policy if they seek further referral for the same diagnosis in the future.

## **INTERNATIONAL REFERRALS**

The Patient is considered for referral overseas for tertiary care provided the patient is eligible under the scope of the Policy.

### **Special Criteria apply to the following patients:**

#### **Patients 16 years**

Patients (16) years including any student attending school up to 18 years old and under may be accompanied by a nominated family member. The family member must be able to make decisions on behalf of the child (i.e. parent, uncle, aunty or grandparent).

#### **Patient 65 years**

Patients (65) years and over may be accompanied by one (1) family member. The family member must be able to make decisions on behalf of the patient (i.e. spouse or next of kin).

#### **Dependent Child or Infant**

Dependent child or infant (up to 4 years) may accompany the patient including a twin of another sick twin baby up to four (4) years of age be allowed to travel with the mother.

#### **Infirm and destitute Patients**

Return air and/or sea passage for the patient and a nominated accompanying family member who must be able to make decisions on behalf of the patient (i.e. spouse, parent, uncle or aunty or grandparent) will be booked.

#### **Chronic Disability**

Return air and/or sea passage for the patient and may be accompanied by a nominated family member upon the referring doctor verifying the need for an escort.

#### **Alcohol related motor vehicle crashes or other incidents**

The patient who causes the crash and needs to be referred must make arrangements to pay Fifty percent (50%) of all travel related costs including inpatient hospital fees at the Rarotonga Hospital, except for emergency cases. The same applies to any person who while under the influence of drugs or alcohol is involved in any incident or accident that may require referral overseas.

Payment arrangement must be cleared prior to referral unless otherwise agreed by other arrangements.

A police and medical report will be used to determine when a person is under the influence of alcohol. Where a laboratory test is not available the "MANSEEMSFUL" test will be used.

If the Patient was not directly responsible for the motor vehicle crash then the recovery for costs becomes a civil case. A medical report will be made available to the patient at a cost to facilitate their claim and TMO must also provide Crown Law Office and the Cook Islands Police Prosecution with a copy of cost incurred for recovery

Daily per diem as outlined in the latest HR Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual for Medical and Nurse Escort(s) must be paid before departure. All other costs for transfer will be charged at 50%. Repayment schedule can also be arranged.

If the Patient was not directly responsible for the motor vehicle crash or the incident requiring him/her to be referred then the recovery for costs becomes a civil case. A medical report will be made available to the patient at a cost to facilitate their claim and TMO must also provide Crown Law Office and the Cook Islands Police Prosecution with a copy of cost incurred for recovery.

## Referral Process

### 1. Activation of Patient Referral process:

- a. Referring Doctor consults with the Accepting Officer in New Zealand and presents the history, clinical findings, diagnosis and reason for referral;
- b. Based on clinical picture presented and clarification on further details required, the Accepting Officer determines to accept the patient;
- c. The Referring Doctor informs the patient of imminent referral and processes the referral form;
- d. The Patient referral coordinator proceeds with necessary logistics. Makes sure that documentation is scanned and emailed as appropriate;
- e. Approval is obtained from Secretary of Health.

Special circumstances for **URGENT** referrals include 'verbal or text message' approval being obtained from an Accepting Officer and the Secretary of Health, with written approval being obtained on the first working day.

### Medical and/or Nurse Escort(s)

- a. Medical or nursing escort(s) will be required from time to time to escort a patient as recommended by Air New Zealand MEDA Desk.
- b. All Medical or Nursing escort(s) must hold current annual practising certificates and advanced life support certificates.
- c. All Medical or Nursing escort(s) must provide safe and appropriate health care services for patients during the transfer and must be seated next to patient - no person sits between patient and escort.
- d. For ease and efficient transfer from the airport to the public hospital in Auckland, New Zealand:
  - No Duty free allowance is permitted for all referred patients and medical escort(s).
  - No food or other product that may attract biosecurity clearance is permitted. This will help speed their transit through customs and to hospital services in New Zealand.
  - It is recommended that minimal personal luggage is taken with the patient at the time of referral. Any extra luggage required by the patient is the responsibility of the next of kin.

This is to ensure that if a referred patient requires an escort (as per meda form) then they are considered to be medically unwell and too sick to travel unaccompanied.

- e. The Medical and/or Nurse escort(s) must complete full handover to the Accepting Officer, and he/she must return to their place of work on the first available flight.

- f. A daily per diem as outlined in the latest HR Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual is payable for Medical and/or Nurse Escort(s) for staff must be available prior to departure from Rarotonga. If accommodation is required for either a medical and/or nurse escort(s), a daily accommodation allowance is payable.
- g. Any medical or nursing escorts for referrals under private or medical health insurance schemes from Rarotonga will be paid \$500 per day.

## **Administrative Procedure**

### **1. Activation of the administrative process when referral is activated**

#### **i. Referring Doctor**

- a. Completes Patient Referral form;
- b. Organises signing of Patient Consent form;
- c. Prepares referral letter to Accepting Officer;
- d. Complete the Air New Zealand MEDA form
- e. Consults with Air New Zealand Medical Office duty doctor as required.

#### **ii. Accepting Doctor:**

- a. Referral is accepted via email or phone call by the New Zealand Doctor to manage the patient in New Zealand.

#### **iii. Patient Referral Coordinator:**

- a. Collect passport for verification of documents (if no current passport available then family member is advised to urgently lodge application for a passport);
- b. Coordinate travel arrangements, including MEDA form if required, ambulance services in Rarotonga and New Zealand as required;
- c. Provide New Zealand Patient referral information pamphlet;
- d. Explain and provide Checklist to assist the application for Financial Assistance from Work & Income;
- e. Ensure Chief Medical Officer/Director Hospital Health Services, Chief Nursing Officer have appropriate escort identified as required;
- f. Ensure per diem is provided to the medical/nurse escort before departure;
- g. Send completed Patient Referral form to Secretary of Health for final approval;
- h. Ensure that the documentation is scanned and emailed to the travel agent and New Zealand based Patient Referral Officer;
- i. To inform the ambulance drivers and Charge Nurse of Outpatient Emergency Department of the expected time of departure from the hospital to arrive in a timely manner at the airport;
- j. Monitor and maintain database of all patient referrals;

#### **iv. Finance Officer**

Activates payment of airfares upon receipt of:

- a. Invoice;
- b. Completed and authorised Patient Referral Form;
- c. Completed and authorised works order;

Activates disbursement of medical escort cash float upon receipt of:

- a. Completed expenditure summary;
- b. Completed and authorised Patient Referral form;

- c. Medical escort e-ticket;
- d. Medical escort boarding pass;

Activates direct payment of medical escort allowance to medical escort, In the event that there is insufficient funds in the medical escort cash float at time of referral:

- a. Letter of request from Patient Referral Coordinator;
- b. Completed and authorised Patient Referral form;
- c. Medical escort e-ticket;
- d. Medical escort boarding pass (to be submitted on return);

Activates reimbursements for referred patients, in the event that the patient meets the fare at their own cost:

- a. Letter of recommendation from referral doctor;
- b. Approval from HOM;
- c. Completed and authorised Patient Referral form;
- d. Patient e-ticket;
- e. Other approved medical expenses.

Special circumstances for **URGENT** referrals include 'verbal or text message' approval being obtained at short notice, with the written approval process being obtained as soon as possible afterwards from the Secretary of Health.

## **2. Administrative process for Repatriation:**

- a. Accepting Officer in New Zealand:**
  - a. Provide medical clearance to Patient once all follow up appointments have been completed; and
  - b. Provide a copy of medical clearance for the referring doctor/Rarotonga patient referral coordinator.
  
- b. Patient:**
  - a. Informs the New Zealand Patient Referral Coordinator of medical clearance and provides a copy of the Patient's Records to ensure that patient is cleared of all further management of his/her condition and can return back to home island;
  - b. Contacts Rarotonga patient referral coordinator to make arrangements for travel back to Rarotonga.
  
- c. Patient Referral Coordinator:**
  - a. Receives confirmation of medical clearance for travel to the Cook Islands;
  - b. Contacts Patient/Next of Kin to confirm travel arrangements;
  - c. Arranges airfare for the patient from Auckland, New Zealand to Rarotonga and/or to the Pa Enua if required;
  - d. Forward all documentation to Finance for payment;
  - e. Ensure all data is entered on Medtech.
  - f. Ensure the patient returns back to the Cook Islands within three (3) months following clearance and discharge by Specialist or Hospital.

**Note:** Patients who are not discharged and/or have not received medical clearance and choose to travel back to their island of residence must meet the costs of their travel. Should they fall ill

for the same medical condition TMO will expect the patient to pay the transfer cost. TMO will only be liable for their final repatriation upon receipt of a discharge summary or medical clearance from the Accepting Officer or for urgent situations requiring their return, subject to the approval of the SOH.

Patients who have been cleared to return MUST return within three (3) months after being discharged and cleared by their Accepting Officer in New Zealand or other country as approved by the Secretary of Health. Failure to return within the three months period the referral support will cease and the patient will no longer be a referral patient.

In case the patient are referred for other conditions to other department, the patient is allowed to return if the appointment is more than 3 months. However, if within 3 months, patient is expected to stay until cleared by specialist.

**d. Finance Officer:**

Activates payment of air/sea passage upon receipt of:

- a. Invoice;
- b. Completed and authorised Patient Referral Form;
- c. Death Certificate (where applicable);
- d. Discharge summary from Accepting doctor;
- e. Completed and authorised works order.

Activates reimbursements for referred patients, in the event that the patient meets the fare at their own cost:

- a. Letter of recommendation from referral doctor;
- b. Approval from SOH;
- c. Completed and authorised Patient Referral form;
- d. Death Certificate (where applicable);
- e. Discharge summary from Accepting doctor
- f. Patient e-ticket.

**Deceased Patient**

1. TMO will fund the cost of returning the deceased (including family escort under the special criteria) back to Rarotonga and to Pa Enua if the patient was from the Pa Enua by way of cargo only (freight of human remains).
2. A copy of the Death Certificate and the Airway bill must be presented to the Patient Referral Coordinator at Rarotonga Hospital before payment for freight of human remains can be processed.

Note: If the patient continues to remain in New Zealand for more than 3 months after being discharged or being given their medical clearance, TMO shall cease to be responsible for the patient's return air/ sea fare or freight of human remains to their island they were referred from.

**Change in patient management**

If a patient declines medical treatment once referred to New Zealand, he/she will not be covered by this policy if they seek further referral for the same diagnosis in the future.

### **Repatriation of Palliative Care Patient from New Zealand to the Cook Islands**

TMO will provide a Medical and/or Nurse Escort for the return of a palliative care patient to the Cook Islands if the patient is a referral. MEDA clearance must be initiated by the public hospital and/or hospice where the patient is domiciled in New Zealand and co-ordinated by New Zealand based Patient Referral Co-ordinator.

### **OTHER AGENCIES INVOLVED IN THE REFERRAL PROCESS**

- a. **Cook Islands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration** - Assist in confirming Permanent Resident certificate holders and travel movement.
- b. **Travel/Airline agencies** - Assist with medical evacuations/repatriation;
- c. **Shipping agencies** - Assist with medical evacuation/repatriation;
- d. **Cook Islands Customs department** - Assist with health commodity supplies;
- e. **The Cook Islands New Zealand High Commission office** - Assist with emergency passports/passport requirements;
- f. **The Cook Islands Police Department** - Assist with medical evacuations/repatriation and civil claim;
- g. **Cook Islands Ministry of Justice** - Assist with emergency birth certificates;
- h. **Health New Zealand Te Whatu Ora / Health Providers** - Assist with the accepting public hospitals;
- i. **Other Government Ministries who charter flights to the Pa Enua** - Assisting with cost sharing of charter cost including inter-island transfers by boat/ferry.

## DEFINITIONS & ACRONYMS

1. **Resident Cook Islander** - A person belonging to the part of the Polynesian race indigenous to the Cook Islands; and includes any person descended from a Cook Islander, who has:
  - a. lived continuously in the Cook Islands for more than one year; and
  - b. Permanently Resides in the Cook Islands
2. **Permanent Resident** - A person who has the status of a Permanent Resident of the Cook Islands pursuant to Article 76A of the Cook Islands constitution (as enacted by section 13 of the Constitution Amendment (No.9) Act 1980-81 who;
  - a. Permanently resides in the Cook Islands
3. **Non Cook Islands Expatriate worker** - Expatriate Persons employed in the Cook Islands on a contract basis.
4. **Visitors** - People visiting the Cook Islands.
5. **Tourists** - People in the Cook Islands on recreational holidays away from their home.
6. **16 years and under** - the date of turning 16 years and under.
7. **Infirm and destitute** - those patients registered and managed through the Cook Islands Ministry of Internal Affairs.
8. **Chronic Disability** - where a person's disabilities limit them from providing an income for themselves.
9. **MANSEEMSFUL test** - the test that police use to determine whether a person is intoxicated.

### MANSEEMSFUL

- M - Memory faulty at times
- A - Admission
- N - Note, time, place, date
- S - Speech slurred
- E - Eyes red-blood shot
- E - Driving erratically
- M - Slow Body Movements
- S - Smell odour / alcohol
- F - Face flushed
- U - Unsteady on feet
- L - Liquor

**CMO** – Chief Medical Officer

**CNO** – Chief Nursing Officer

**TMO** – Te Marae Ora Ministry of Health

**HOM** – Head of Ministry

**NZ** – New Zealand

**DHHS** - Director of Hospital Health Services

**MEDA** - Medical Information form for Air Travel

## **ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS**

- Cook Islands Constitution 1965
- Ministry of Health Act 2013
- Entry, Residents and Departure Act 1971-72
- Cook Islands National Health Strategic Plan 2023
- TMO Human Resources & Personnel Policies and Procedures Manual 2024