

Policy Applies to: All Mercy Hospital staff and Credentialed Specialists who handle and/or receive a request from a patient for the return of ngā wāhanga tinana/body parts, tissue and substances. This policy does not refer to the return of metalware or implants.

Related Standards:

- NZS 8134:2022 Ngā Paerewa Health and Disability Services Standard
- NZS 4304:2002 Management of Healthcare Waste Standard
- Code of Health and Disability Services Patient's Rights 1996
- EQulP standards:
 - 1.3.1 – Health care and services are appropriate
 - 1.5.2 - The infection control system supports the safe practice and ensures a safe environment for consumers/patients and healthcare workers
 - 1.6.2 – Consumers are informed of their rights and responsibilities
 - 1.6.3 – The organisation makes provision for consumers from culturally diverse backgrounds

Rationale:

Mercy Hospital supports the return of ngā wāhanga tinana/body parts, tissue and substances wherever possible to those for whom it has personal or cultural significance.

Regardless of how minor the ngā wāhanga tinana is perceived to be by staff, the cultural/religious needs of the patient will guide best practice for the return of ngā wāhanga tinana. However, we have a public health responsibility as well as a responsibility to our patients. For this reason, tissue that is known to be infectious or cytotoxic e.g., infected tonsils or tissue treated by chemotherapy or radiotherapy cannot be returned.

Cultural support is available for patients and can be accessed through the Mercy Hospital nursing staff.

The following principles apply to the return or disposal of ngā wāhanga tinana:

- Every consumer has the right to make a decision about the return or disposal of any ngā wāhanga tinana and body substances removed or obtained during the course of healthcare *Code of Health and Disability Consumers' Rights 1996, Right 7 (9) amended 11 June 2004.*
- No wāhanga tinana or bodily substance removed or obtained in the course of a health care procedure may be stored, preserved or used unless:
 - a) With the informed consent of the consumer;
 - b) For the purposes of research that has received the approval of an Ethics Committee – *Code of Health and Disability Services Consumers' Rights; Right 7 (10) amended 11 June 2004.*

Cultural Considerations:

The separation of wāhanga tinana (body parts/tissue/substances) from the body is in contrast to the Māori, Pacific and other community beliefs and has the potential to cause stress and anxiety. Therefore the process of returned disposal of wāhanga tinana must be part of the conversation leading up to surgery.

Definitions:

Ngā Wāhanga Tinana: Any tissue, part, or substance including hair and nail clippings removed from the body. This encompasses gross specimens, processed tissue and tissue slices. It does not include implants or metalware.

Informed Consent: A reasoned decision made by a patient based on sufficient information being provided, in such a way the patient can understand the rationale and consequences of their decision. The credentialed Specialist is responsible for ensuring the patient receives appropriate information.

Histology: Examination of ngā wāhanga tinana or body substances under a microscope. Specimens collected at Mercy Hospital will be sent to Southern Community Laboratories for preparation and examination.

Objectives:

- To ensure that ngā wāhanga tinana are handled, released or disposed of in a safe and culturally acceptable manner and in accordance with relevant legislation.
- To ensure patients (or whanāu/parents/guardians for children) receive sufficient information to make an informed decision about the examination/testing of ngā wāhanga tinana and the disposal or return of ngā wāhanga tinana.

Implementation:

- Patient information booklet on the process for the return or disposal of ngā wāhanga tinana is available from reception, theatre and wards of the Mercy Hospital Campus and available on request from nursing staff and consultants' rooms.
- New staff are made aware of the process and how to access policy information as part of their orientation.
- Policy Updates are advised at the Head of Department (HOD) meeting: HODs inform existing staff.

Evaluation:

- Cemplicity data feedback
- consumer feedback
- Complaints process
- Incident process

Associated Documents

External

- The Code of Health & Disability Services Consumers Rights 2004, Right 7 and 9 (Amended 2004)
- The Human Tissue Act 2008

Internal

- Mercy Hospital Tikaka Best Practice Guidelines
- Cultural Policy - SharePoint
- Pastoral care/Chaplaincy Services
- Waste Management Policy

Process

Care of Ngā Wāhanga Tinana /Body Parts, Tissue, and Substances, Not Requested by Patient or Whanāu/Family:

- Ngā wāhanga tinana /body parts, tissue and or substances that are expressible and that are smaller in size than a bone joint must be double bagged and placed in the biohazard waste stream for collection and incineration by the contracted company. Ngā wāhanga tinana larger than a bone joint must be sent to the Dunedin Hospital mortuary; they will arrange for cremation via a funeral director (Transfer form - Appendix 2 must be completed – tick box for cremation - and a copy of the form sent with the item).
- The ngā wāhanga tinana /body parts and tissue must be double bagged and wrapped to ensure the item is not visible and transported in a sealed box for transport to the mortuary.
- Ngā wāhanga tinana must only be delivered during office hours of the mortuary. Transport of the item to the Dunedin Hospital mortuary should be arranged through Dunedin Taxis, Ph 477 7777.

Return of Ngā Wāhanga Tinana /Body Parts, Tissue and or Substances, Requested by Patient or Whanāu/Family:

- Where ngā wāhanga tinana /body parts, tissue and or substances are requested, Mercy Hospital shall determine if release represents a risk to the public or the environment prior to its release.
- In cases where the organisation is concerned that the release of the wāhanga tinana /body part, tissue and or substances represents an unacceptable risk and there is a dispute with those wishing to take possession of the wāhanga tinana, the Director of Clinical Services or delegate should seek guidance from the Medical Officer of Health (Public Health South, Ph 03 474 1700).
- If the wāhanga tinana /body part is able to be released, it must be double bagged in plastic bags and then placed in a paper bag to ensure the contents are not visible. The plastic bag and paper bag should both have patient identification labels. Alternatively, an opaque container can be used in replacement of a paper bag. Should the body part need to be stored in fluid, normal saline must be used.

Nursing Staff Responsibilities Following a Patient's Request for the Return of Ngā Wāhanga Tinana /Body Parts, Tissue and Substances:

- Admission nurse will ascertain whether it is important to the patient to keep the tissue for cultural reasons or whether they are just curious to see what the wāhanga tinana /body part, tissue and or substance looks like. If the latter, the admission nurse will offer to provide a photo. This will be documented on the pre-op checklist.
- Nurse to ensure patient receives an information booklet (Appendix 4).
- Document request on
 - a) Clinical pathway, and
 - b) Pre-op check list
- Have patient complete part one of the request and return form (Appendix 3); place this in the front of the clinical record.
- Notify theatre staff / surgeon as per actions on clinical pathway.
- Prior to transferring the patient from the admission area to Operating Theatre Suite, theatre staff view pre-op checklist to confirm whether the patient would like the wāhanga tinana returned.

- At the time of surgery, the theatre nurse collects the wāhanga tinana, double bag into plastic bags and places it in an appropriate container or paper bag. The bag and container are to be clearly labelled with content, and patient's identification details and marked for "return to patient"
- The wāhanga tinana is returned to the ward with the patient unless the surgeon wishes to send for histology first.
- Patient or whanāu/family member nominated by the patient shall sign part two of the request and return form (Appendix 3) to acknowledge receipt of the wāhanga tinana. This form is retained in the patient's clinical record.
- If the patient remains in hospital and the wāhanga tinana /body part and tissue cannot be collected immediately by whanau/family or a person nominated by the patient, it will be sent to the Dunedin Hospital mortuary for storage. The transfer form (Appendix 2) is to be completed - tick box for storage – a copy of the form sent with the item. The ngā wāhanga tinana should be clearly labelled with the patient details including NHI and marked "return to patient".
- Storage of ngā wāhanga tinana at Dunedin Hospital Mortuary is for a maximum of 6 weeks.
- Patient or whanāu/family must be told to contact mortuary staff at Dunedin Hospital (phone 03 470 9314 (this transfers to an on call cell phone outside of the mortuary office hours). with regard to collecting the wāhanga tinana. When collecting the wāhanga tinana, the patient or whanāu/family will be asked for identification and are required to sign a form acknowledging receipt of the wāhanga tinana.

Ngā Wāhanga Tinana /Body Parts, Tissues and or Substances sent for Histology:

- Theatre nurse informs the laboratory of the patient's request to have their wāhanga tinana returned and clearly documents this on the laboratory form.
- Laboratory staff will be responsible for notifying patient in writing when the wāhanga tinana is ready for collection.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Process Flow Chart

Appendix 2 - Transfer of Body part to Mortuary

Appendix 3 – Return of Body Part – Human Tissue to Patient

Appendix 4 – Patient and Whānau Information