

SENATE LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into serious allegations of abuse, self-harm and neglect of asylum seekers in relation to the Nauru Regional Processing Centre, and any like allegations in relation to the Manus Regional Processing Centre.

Public Hearing: Wednesday, 15 March 2017 from 3.00pm to 3.45pm

Opening Statement - International Health & Medical Services (IHMS)

On behalf of IHMS; I would like to thank you for the invitation to appear before the committee. We would like to provide you with an opening statement.

IHMS acknowledges that the regional processing centres and related government policy generate a great deal of interest from the media, political parties, advocacy groups and members of the public. IHMS is however not a political organisation – it is a medically-led health services provider and we believe that refugees and asylum seekers, as with all patients, have the right to high quality health care. IHMS medical professionals operate within a very robust clinical governance system with a mission to deliver high quality, medically appropriate healthcare with humanity and cultural sensitivity.

Before I discuss the healthcare services IHMS delivers at the regional processing countries, I believe it is important to point out that IHMS is also contracted by the Australian Government to deliver health services at detention facilities within Australia, including at the Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre, and we have been delivering these services since 2003.

IHMS is contracted by the Australian Government, represented by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection, to provide primary and mental health care services to asylum seekers and refugees who reside at the Regional Processing Centres (RPCs) on Nauru and Manus Island.

In addition, IHMS is also contracted by the Department to provide primary and mental health services to refugees living in the Nauru community. We are also contracted to provide limited primary health and mental health services to the refugees living at the East Lorengau Refugee Transit Centre (ELRTC) in Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. Refugees in Nauru and Manus also have the option of accessing healthcare from the local health services and hospitals.

IHMS would like to provide clarity in respect to the standards of care for which we are contracted.

Under the Regional Processing Countries Health Services Contract for the delivery of health services to asylum seekers, IHMS is contracted to provide health services “...to a standard that is the best available in the circumstances and that is as far as possible (but recognising any unavoidable limitations deriving from the circumstances of Manus Island and Nauru) broadly comparable with health services available within the Australian community;”

In respect to the primary and mental health support provided at the Nauru settlement health clinic to refugees living in the community, IHMS is contracted to provide a standard equivalent to the local level of care. The contract states: “...provide Refugees with a standard and range of health services that is the best available in the circumstances, and utilising facilities and personnel on Nauru, and that as far as possible (but

recognising any unavoidable limitations deriving from the circumstances of Nauru) is broadly comparable with health services available within the Nauruan community;”.

Refugees still living at the Regional Processing Centres; (for example those who are not yet living in local communities), are afforded the same level of care as that provided to asylum seekers living in the RPCs. General practitioner, nursing and mental health care clinics are open at both RPCs seven days a week. There is also after-hours medical staffing to respond to any after-hours RPC medical emergencies. The primary health clinical team in Nauru is augmented by obstetricians, midwives and medical officers with paediatric training.

To supplement the on-site primary health care service to Asylum Seekers and Refugees at the RPCs, IHMS provides specialist services via visiting medical specialists, tele-health consultations with specialists based in Australia, as well as second opinions from specialists based in Australia who review the clinical records. Patients are also referred for specialist opinions at Pacific International Hospital (PIH) in Port Moresby in line with Australian Government policy.

In addition to providing first-line health care, IHMS undertakes health-promotion and disease-prevention activities, assisting people with chronic conditions to manage their own health. IHMS also provides a comprehensive vector control program at the Manus Island which aims to control the risks associated with mosquito transmitted diseases.

In Nauru, additional health services for refugees, such as emergency, specialist and allied health care are provided by the Republic of Nauru Hospital and not by IHMS. The Republic of Nauru Hospital is a public hospital run by the Government of Nauru. The Nauru Hospital is staffed by Nauru Hospital employees. IHMS does not hold an exclusive arrangement for healthcare provision and the Department engages other healthcare providers to support the provision of care to refugees and transferees including at the Nauru Hospital.

If IHMS determines that an asylum seeker residing at the RPC in Nauru requires access to specialist care which cannot be provided on Nauru or via telehealth consultation, IHMS will recommend transfer for specialist medical care and submit a Request for Medical Movement (RMM) to the Department (also known as RMMs). The Department is then responsible for granting approval of the RMM and facilitating the transfer as recommended.

For refugees residing in the Nauruan community or at the RPC, the Nauru Hospital follows a process called the Overseas Medical Referral process (OMR process). A patient, whether a Nauruan national or refugee, is referred to the OMR Committee by a Nauru Hospital doctor and the Committee makes a decision as to whether the patient will see a specialist at the Nauru Hospital or be transferred to a third country for treatment. IHMS is not responsible for the management of this process.

During the time that IHMS has operated in Nauru, IHMS has provided continued support to the Nauru Hospital through capacity building activities with the aim of improving the quality and availability of healthcare services.

Since 2003 when IHMS first began providing services to people in immigration detention and then to asylum seekers and refugees on Manus Island and Nauru, IHMS has developed robust systems to assure high standards of care for all of our patients, in full compliance with international healthcare standards and regulations. IHMS is committed to continually improving our business to ensure that we deliver a quality service to our patients.

The IHMS healthcare facilities operating on mainland Australia have previously been audited and accredited against the Royal Australian College of General Practice (RACGP) Standards for immigration detention. IHMS policies, procedures and clinical practice guidelines are based on these standards. Although the healthcare services in Manus and Nauru cannot be accredited to the RACGP standards due to being outside the Australian jurisdiction, the same IHMS policies, procedures and practice guidelines are utilised at the Regional Processing Centres and the services align with these same standards.

Clinical governance is delivered by sites having clinical supervision from medical directors, health services managers, senior medical officers, GPs and registered nurses who have experience and knowledge of health care service provision within the Australian community and have an ethical obligation to apply those medical standards to their patients. This extensive clinical governance is supported by relevant policies and processes with clinical treatment being provided in line with evidence based guidelines primarily developed and recognised in Australia.

IHMS is accredited to ISO 9001:2008 quality standards certification. This accreditation includes the IHMS clinics on Nauru and Manus Island. In addition to holding current ISO 9001:2008 certification, IHMS has a formal Quality Management System to evaluate and improve the activities of the business. The Quality Management System encompasses all the different methods by which we maintain, measure, and improve our business.

IHMS also works closely with the Department to review the quality of care during scheduled quality and risk committee meetings and also participates actively in the engagement with the Department's Independent Health Advisory Panel (IHAP).

The performance of IHMS is subject to considerable scrutiny and formal monitoring in accordance with its contracts with the Department of Immigration and Border Protection. IHMS is one of the most scrutinised health care providers in Australia and the standard of the health care IHMS provides is regularly reviewed and assessed by external bodies. IHMS engages openly and proactively with a wide range of external scrutiny bodies including the Commonwealth Ombudsman, the Australian National Audit Office, Comcare, various Senate Select Committees, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the United National High Commissioner for Refugees, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. IHMS also has regular contact with professional bodies such as the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

The Department has a comprehensive performance management program that assesses IHMS healthcare services delivered under the RPC Contract. The performance requirements comprise of a broad range of metrics including healthcare delivery and timeliness, preventative health services, complaints and service feedback, incident reporting, mental health screening and assessment, work health and safety as well as quality of health care records.

IHMS staff come from of a broad range of a cultural backgrounds and many have prior experience in the delivery of refugee health services including in international settings. This workforce diversity helps to ensure the application of cultural sensitivity and compassion with client groups. IHMS staff are highly committed and dedicated to the provision of high quality healthcare services to asylum seekers and refugees in this complex and challenging environment. This commitment is demonstrated on a daily basis.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to appear before the committee.