



AUCKLAND DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD

Communications

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## **ADHB Media Release**

**December 1, 2010**

### **Starship Processes For Potential Child Abuse Cases**

The processes followed by Starship Hospital clinicians in potential cases of non-accidental injury to children protect the interests of the child while keeping parents informed as investigations unfold, acting head of child health Scott Macfarlane said.

Dr Macfarlane said it was inappropriate to publicly discuss the clinical details of individual cases but said Starship clinicians were acutely aware that the sensitive nature of their investigations carried the potential to offend parents.

This was why a pamphlet had been developed to explain the process doctors were undertaking to those parents who found themselves in this situation.

“It is frequently the case that non-accidental injury is just one of a number of potential explanations for what is wrong with a child,” Dr Macfarlane said.

“Our clinicians need to sort through all the medical evidence and it is important that the child is kept safe while this is happening.

“Many of the children we see will ultimately be determined to have not been abused.

“That does not mean Starship doctors were wrong; it simply means appropriate precautions were taken while the possibility of non-accidental injury was eliminated.

“We understand and fully appreciate that parents in this situation may be upset that suspicion has been raised about their child potentially having been abused by someone.

“That is a logical and understandable human response and we recognised that there was a need to do more to help parents understand what steps Starship was following.

“A pamphlet was developed that steps parents through the process and it was developed with the assistance of a family who felt traumatised by their experience in this position.

“We hope that making this resource available will inform parents and reassure them that the process is working in the best interests of their child.”

Dr Macfarlane said there was an important distinction between the role of Starship clinicians in assessing medical evidence and the functions of police and the legal system.

“Starship clinicians do not lay charges and do not decide guilt or innocence,” he said.

“Our specialists may decide there is sufficient clinical suspicion that abuse may explain the child’s condition but from this point, other agencies may or may not lay charges and a court may or may not find guilt.

“In cases where charges are not laid, it does not mean Starship ‘got it wrong’; it means we provided advice based on the medical evidence and for any one of a range of potential reasons, police or Child Youth and Family Services took a different view.

“Similarly, when a verdict of not guilty is returned by the court, it does not necessarily mean Starship was wrong. We accept that we can’t always be right but a verdict of this nature may simply reflect the difficulty of proving abuse beyond reasonable doubt.”

Dr Macfarlane said Ronald McDonald House operated independently of Starship by a Trust Board that was responsible for its own admission policies.

**For further information please contact Matt Rogers, External Communications Specialist 021 804 122**