

Capital and Coast District Health Board

C/- Debbie Chin

Interim Chief Executive

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Wellington South

(Delivered by email to: debbie.chin@ccdhb.org.nz, jennifer.ashman@ccdhb.org.nz)

13 February 2014

Dear Debbie,

Re: 'Toys for Tots' at Wellington Hospital

On 23 December 2013, military personnel belonging to the United States Marine Corps (USMC) entered Wellington Children's Hospital. They were invited onto the premises to distribute Christmas presents as part of a charity programme, 'Toys for Tots.' From the photographs, it is clear that the soldiers were wearing full uniform and that invited media [covered the event](#).¹

The presence of on-duty US military personnel in Wellington Hospital raises serious issues.

As the [Standard Operating Procedures](#)² manual explains: "Toys for Tots is an official activity of the U.S. Marine Corps and an official mission of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve." It operates under the auspices of the Director US Marine Corps Public Affairs.

The core mission of the USMC Division of Public Affairs is to minimize ill will and negative publicity arising from Marine Corps activities—otherwise known as "the hearts and minds campaign." The crude nature of "Toys for Tots" propaganda is laid bare in the sample speech notes for USMC representatives, contained in the Procedures manual:

"SINCE 1775 THE MARINE CORPS HAS DEFENDED FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY - A DUTY THEY HAVE FULFILLED WITH HONOR, COURAGE, AND COMMITMENT. AS THEY HAVE FULFILLED THAT DUTY, MARINES HAVE EARNED A WELL DESERVED REPUTATION FOR TOUGHNESS.

BUT THERE'S ANOTHER SIDE TO THE MARINE CORPS - A DEEP COMPASSION FOR THE UNDER-PRIVILEGED CHILDREN OF AMERICA... THAT SIDE IS FOUND IN THE U.S. MARINE CORPS RESERVE TOYS FOR TOTS PROGRAM".

1 'US marines spread Christmas cheer', *Dominion Post*, 23 December 2013

2 *Standard Operating Procedures - Local Toys for Tots Campaigns, 2013 edition*

The Wellington-based detachment commander Brian Muturi reportedly “leapt at the opportunity” to distribute the toys in the Children’s Hospital.

It is understandable why the US Marines may have wanted to utilise photo opportunities at Capital & Coast DHB facilities to generate positive publicity.

In 2004, US Marines led assaults on hospitals and medical centres in the Iraqi city of Fallujah in breach of international law, according to embedded journalists reporting for [BBC News](#)³ and the [New York Times](#).⁴ These assaults targeted patients, doctors, nurses and other health workers. The Nazzal Emergency Hospital was “razed to the ground.” The [Los Angeles Times](#) reported similar attacks by US Marines on hospitals in another Iraqi city in 2006.⁵ According to comprehensive accounting by Iraq Body Count, the actions of US Marines and other armed forces in Iraq resulted in 120,000-134,000 avoidable deaths from violence, the most common cause being gunfire.⁶

What is less understandable is why Capital & Coast District Health Board would allow Wellington Hospital to be used for this purpose.

Irrespective of their stated “aim” of delivering toys for children, we believe that assisting “an official activity of the U.S. Marine Corps and an official mission of the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve” is incompatible with the functions of a New Zealand hospital.

The statutory objectives of Capital and Coast District Health Board include these goals:

- a) to improve, promote, and protect the health of people and communities
- b) to exhibit a sense of social responsibility by having regard to the interests of the people to whom it provides, or for whom it arranges the provision of, services

Wellington Hospital serves a diverse community including a large number of refugees. Many of these people come from communities (Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, in particular) that have experienced major trauma associated with US troops. The presence of uniformed US military personnel within the hospital could be a negative triggering event for these people.

The presence of media at the event at Wellington Hospital demonstrated that positive promotion of the US military is one main aim of this programme. No hospital should be complicit in such promotion.

3 ‘US strikes raze Falluja hospital’, *BBC News*, 6 November 2004

4 ‘Early Target of Offensive Is a Hospital’, *NY Times*, 8 November 2004

5 ‘Bomb Kills 12 Near Shrine; Marines Raid Iraqi Hospital’, *LA Times*, 6 July 2006

6 Iraq Body Count. Documented civilian deaths from violence

As residents in the Capital and Coast District, and having phoned the Secretary of the Board, we will seek permission to speak to these issues at the public section of the District Health Board meeting on 14 February.

We thank you for your attention to this matter and look forward to a reply after due consideration by the Board.

Yours sincerely,



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