

11th September 2025

Dr Jennifer Walker
Health New Zealand Te Tai Tokerau
Maunu Road
Whangarei

Tēnā koe Dr Walker,

RE: LANYARD AND LANYARD PINS

This letter is to advise you of STONZ's position on and concerns about recent correspondence with RMOs about wearing lanyards and lanyard pins that appear to indicate an identification with a specific cause. We are aware that you wrote to RMOs about this behaviour on 28th August 2025.

As far as STONZ is aware, it has long been a trend for RMOs, and other hospital staff, to wear their ID tag and other security items on a lanyard around the neck. Lanyards have been used to both personalise work clothing and to demonstrate support for various organisations, causes or groups. Indeed, STONZ provides branded lanyards to members, and we are aware that many other unions do the same. Over time, lanyards and pins have been used to express various causes, including support for the Ukraine in the context of the Ukraine/Russia conflict, expressions of allegiance with or support for LGBTQIA communities, identification with tangata whenua or the tino rangatiratanga movement, religious beliefs or affiliations, originating cultures and language, the following of a sports team, or the illustration of other interests. To our knowledge, the use of lanyards in this way, or the adornment of lanyards with pins or broaches that do the same thing, has never been of concern to Health New Zealand.

Therefore, we were surprised to see it suggested that the wearing of lanyards or pins that appear to express support for the people suffering in Palestine has been regarded as “unprofessional”, “political” and potentially in breach of standards of integrity and conduct. Every person has the right to a freedom of expression. Every employer has an obligation to act in a manner that is consistent with the actions of a fair and reasonable employer. We believe that your language in your email to the RMOs came across as threatening and wrongly analyses the standards to which staff should be held.

We note that what might amount to a “political” statement depends on the perspective of the parties to a conversation. The State Services standards generally refer to political statements as regarding the government of the day – appropriately given that the role of the State Service is to work for the government of the day. We are not aware of any political campaigning via RMO lanyards and pins.

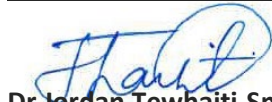
In our view, it is not reasonable to regard an expression on a lanyard as unprofessional, political, or lacking in integrity. This is especially the case where the expression of some causes is clearly acceptable to the employer (because it has never previously been a topic of concern). In those circumstances, your concerns seem to be linked entirely to the cause that is being promoted here (i.e. an inferred comment on the Palestinian conflict) and not the action itself. If that is the case, what is the fair and reasonable basis on which the employer has determined that expressions of support for other causes are acceptable while this one is not?

STONZ upholds that RMOs are required to act professionally and provide best and unbiased care to all patients, and act respectfully to all colleagues. STONZ will not tolerate indecent, offensive, vulgar, racist or otherwise discriminatory behaviour by members. However, STONZ will defend any member who faces any employment action alleging inappropriate behaviour based on the wearing of a lanyard or pin or any other behaviour that respectfully expresses support for a cause.

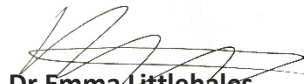
We trust that you can respect the capacity of RMOs, as medical practitioners, to be informed of cultural and world concerns, and to use their power and role as doctors to advocate widely for the health and safety of all people. This includes those who might be victims of conflict or oppression, and to do that while upholding their weighty professional obligations.

Nāku noa, nā

STONZ Senior Executive



Dr Jordan Tewhaiti-Smith
President



Dr Emma Littlehales
Vice-president



Dr Alastair Hercus
Senior Executive



Dr Briana Northey
Senior Executive