

Response to NZ Media Council Case 1260

Chris Pook vs NZ Herald

Dr Pook's original complaint was received by the *Herald* on April 9. Several of the issues raised were the same as had been highlighted by a previous complainant and had been acted upon. These changes were:

- Further balance had been added to the sentence “puberty blockers are reversible”. The research remains disputed, and it was conceded that further context was required to make this clear. A note was also added to the end of the article giving due prominence to the change.
- Context was added to reinforce that Justice Wilkinson-Smith's judgment was interim and has triggered a full judicial review.

A reply was sent to Dr Pook on April 13, making clear that the amendments had been made and that a note detailing the corrections had been added to the article.

Broadly, this article is angled on the lived experiences of a trans woman. It is clear where she sits on what is a highly contested set of issues, which have been highly politicised.

This is also a long-running debate and, as stipulated in Principle 1, it is not reasonable to present every side of the argument in every report. This is supported by Media Council previous rulings 3398 (Jan Rivers against *Stuff*, point 49 <https://www.mediacouncil.org.nz/rulings/jan-rivers-against-stuff-3398/>) and 3594 (Jan Rivers against *The Press*, point 30 <https://www.mediacouncil.org.nz/rulings/jan-rivers-against-the-press/>).

However, a significant section of the article is devoted to making clear that independent reviews – most significantly the Cass Review – found that there are problems with existing research on gender medicine. This is echoed in the quote used from Health NZ in its 2024 evidence brief, which cites the “dearth and poor quality of evidence”.

Since the article in question was published, the *Herald* has also published an opinion piece that is more heavily weighted towards the arguments Dr Pook is highlighting: <https://www.nzherald.co.nz/business/puberty-blockers-ban-judicial-review-and-political-decisions-deborah-chambers/premium/BWN4EPOTYRENTFUXP7M3KM3HC4/>

The expert used for information, Professor Paul Hofman – a paediatric endocrinologist at the University of Auckland – was recommended to our journalist by the Science Media Centre as an expert with no political bias. As an endocrinologist, Dr Hofman uses puberty blockers for a wide variety of reasons, including when required in trans healthcare (although it is not his specialty). He was approached for comment, on a purely scientific

level, about how puberty blockers function and his view on their value in trans healthcare. The quotes are attributed as such.

However, the one line that did not have this attribution – and the statement that is central to Dr Pook’s complaint – has been amended:

Original line:

“Puberty blockers are reversible.”

Amended to:

“Puberty blockers have long been thought of as fully reversible, although this was disputed by the Cass Review, which said the claim that there were no lasting negative effects was lacking evidence.”

Claim the article breaches Principle 1

The article is framed around the lived experience of a trans woman; it is not angled as an explainer or news article. The disputes over evidence are mentioned several times. The amendment to the line on the reversibility of puberty blockers now explicitly references the issues with evidence found by the Cass Review. The Ministry of Health is also quoted on its position regarding the ongoing legal process, providing further balance.

Claim the article breaches Principle 4

This has been addressed by the amendment described above.

Claim the article breaches Principle 6

The ‘hitting pause’ subhead is clearly in reference to the comments from Professor Hofman and the central story of Zoe and Julia. With the above amendment, there is no reasonable argument that a reader would find this confusing.