

Media Release

From: Tracey Adamson
Date: 7 May 2010
Subject: DHB Ambulance service increases paramedic cover

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Southern Wairarapa residents will receive paramedic care when they need it 24 hours a day, seven days a week, in a move to more closely align ambulance services with clinical care at hospitals in the region.

Increased funding from the Ministry of Health in October last year enabled the Wairarapa DHB owned and operated Wairarapa Ambulance Service to employ two extra paramedics to cover Southern Wairarapa after hours from 6pm to 6am. "Wairarapa DHB is committed to continuing to provide its own ambulance service," said DHB chief executive Tracey Adamson. "We want a strong, competent and sustainable workforce including voluntary staff."

"This is consistent with ensuring the right clinicians are in the right place at the right time and that our services are designed to improve the patient's experience and outcomes right from the start of their care."

Ms Adamson said the DHB would not renew the contract it has with St John Ambulance for after hours service in Southern Wairarapa. "With the introduction of 24 hour paramedic cover from Greytown station late last year, we no longer need to duplicate services. The contract with St John coming up for renewal on 30 June gave us the opportunity to make this change."

The Greytown Station is now staffed with one full-time paramedic and one volunteer at night. Like all ambulance services around the country, Wairarapa Ambulance Service relies on volunteer auxiliaries at night to ensure all callouts are double-crewed.

"We are hugely appreciative of our ambulance service and having a paramedic at every first response has got to be a change for the better," said GP Annie Lincoln. "Every volunteer will now have a qualified paramedic by their side on all callouts which will enhance not only patient care but the skills of the volunteers," said Dr Lincoln.

"We want to thank St John volunteers for the services they have provided to date," said Ms Adamson. "We have invited them to continue to support ambulance service provision in Wairarapa through joining the Wairarapa Ambulance Service voluntary workforce."

“The board also wants to acknowledge the Order of St John and appreciates all their efforts to look after our community members when they are at their most vulnerable. The superb youth programmes, first aid training, event services and Lifelink alarms are important services provided to and for the community.”

Wairarapa Hospital Emergency Department medical officer and GP, Dr Tony Becker, said the provision of health care required highly trained professionals at all levels working together for the benefit of the patient. “The changes will enhance the care given to the people of South Wairarapa and open doors to new and exciting possibilities in the way services are provided. I thank St John for the job they have done.”

“St John will continue to pay the current part charge for the subscribers who are Friends of St John.” Wairarapa Ambulance Service will continue to respond, as it does now, to calls from Lifelink alarms.

In order to improve the experience and outcomes for those patients requiring tertiary level care, Ms Adamson said the DHB was beginning discussions to develop a stronger alliance with Wellington Free Ambulance Services and Hutt Valley and Capital Coast District Health Boards.

Ms Adamson said the board’s aspiration was to eventually provide free ambulance services for Wairarapa residents. Currently there is a part charge for cases that are not covered by ACC.

In other moves last year to improve clinical care in the Wairarapa Ambulance Service, Dr Alan Shirley, DHB Chief Medical Officer was appointed as its medical director and duty watch officers were appointed to ensure daily compliance with national standards. A new volunteer induction process was developed and training needs of all ambulance staff identified.

All DHB paramedics are trained to either advanced or intermediate level with Duty Watch Officer and senior paramedic, Sharon Cretney, holding the highest tertiary qualification possible in New Zealand.

Wairarapa Ambulance Service attends more than 4,500 callouts a year, travels an average of 220,000kms a year, and covers the area from Mount Bruce to Ocean Beach.

(639 words)

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