

11 January 2017

Another junior doctors strike will impact Wairarapa DHB

On 30 December 2016 Dr Deborah Powell, National Secretary of New Zealand Resident Doctors' Association (NZRDA), issued strike notices on behalf of members for a 73-hour 'full withdrawal of labour' strike beginning at 0700 Tuesday, 17 January.

While negotiations are ongoing between district health boards and the union, contingency planning is well underway at 18 of New Zealand's 20 DHBs, including Wairarapa, so that they can be prepared if the strike does take place. Taranaki and West Coast DHB doctors voted not to participate in the strike.

As happened in the weeks leading up to the November strike, Wairarapa DHB staff are meeting with ambulance services and primary care representatives to overview preparations. Roster cover is all but completed and the DHB is confident it will be able to adequately staff the hospital over the period.

"We hope to minimise the impact on patients and this time we will be keeping most services active throughout the strike period, more so than last time," says Chief Medical Officer, Dr Tom Gibson.

Planning to maintain business as usual as much as possible means only four surgical patients will be impacted in this month's strike, and no clinics will be affected. Well over a hundred patients had surgery and general appointments rescheduled during last year's industrial action in November.

"These four patients have each already received rescheduling instructions. One has had their treatment brought forward and will receive treatment prior to the strike, and the other three will be seeing us very soon afterwards," said Dr Gibson.

The DHB is working hard to ensure the Wairarapa community is not unnecessarily disrupted by the NZRDA strike action.

"While we are working without the RMOs over the strike period, it will be a big help to us if people can keep the emergency department free for emergencies only," said Dr Gibson.

"It is normal practice for people to see their GP first, unless it is an emergency situation. We are not asking for anything out of the ordinary but a special reminder while staffing is tight can't go amiss. Seeing your GP when symptoms first appear, instead of delaying getting help, can prevent you becoming seriously ill and needing emergency services," he said.

Patients can also contact Healthline for advice on 0800 611 611.

“The two strikes last year, one of which was cancelled at the last minute, and this strike have caused a lot of work and energy to be diverted from the normal business of the hospital to mitigate the effects of the strike. Unfortunately, this has had inevitable impacts on patients,” Dr Gibson said.

“DHBs have not walked away from negotiations. It would be a great outcome to have this resolved without the need for strike action, but it is a complicated process.

“I am just extremely pleased that we have been able to structure a contingency plan that maintains patient safety and has minimal impact on the people of Wairarapa,” said Dr Gibson.

ENDS

For more information:

Anna Cardno

Communications Manager

Wairarapa District Health Board

P: 027 205 2422

E: anna.cardno@wairarapa.dhb.org.nz