

Media release

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Wairarapa DHB announces immediate interim changes to its acute orthopaedic care service

Unplanned service challenges have led Wairarapa District Health Board to close its acute orthopaedic service which, from today, will be provided in Wellington, Hutt Valley and Palmerston North.

This means that people in Wairarapa presenting with acute orthopaedic needs will need to travel for surgery.

The DHB advises this is an interim solution that will be regularly reviewed.

“Our community deserves and expects the right care in the right place at the right time, and as close to home as possible,” Dale Oliff, Chief Executive of the Wairarapa DHB said.

“The needs of the Wairarapa community is continually at the centre of our decision making, but the clinical safety of staff and patients is always our number one priority.

“We champion the best care for our region within the clinical constraints we have and we always seek the best solution for our population.”

“Unfortunately, for now, people will have to travel for treatment if they have an injury that requires acute orthopaedic surgery.”

The temporary changes to the orthopaedic service have come about due to a constrained workforce. While the interim service plan is still being fine-tuned, it took effect from 8am today.

“Wairarapa’s orthopaedic service is designed to be provided by four resident surgeons with some locum cover, rostered to provide 24/7 care. Currently only three surgeons are rostered, one of whom has leave planned from July, which leaves the hospital short of specialists to deliver a safe service,” Dale Oliff said.

“Unfortunately this means that, for a time, acute surgical care has to be provided elsewhere.”

The orthopaedic service makes up approximately 25% of Wairarapa’s surgical throughput, with over 900 orthopaedic surgeries delivered locally each year. Around 400 of those are acute cases.

“We know the impact of having to travel for acute care will be significant for our Wairarapa patients, and we will be doing all we can to make things as seamless as possible, including working on travel options for patients that will be going out of the region for acute orthopaedic care,” Oliff said.

“Our staff are working hard now to ensure our scheduled patients that are expecting local orthopaedic care are informed, to avoid any confusion about their care plan,” Oliff said.

“We are very grateful to CCDHB, HVDHB and MCDHB for their willingness and their agility in supporting us and our Wairarapa community. We have long recognized the opportunities in the health sector for increased regional collaboration, and this situation illustrates the advantages for our service in having hospitals close by that can provide our patients quality care,” Oliff said.

Wairarapa DHB’s recruitment efforts have been extensive, but unsuccessful.

To date, Wairarapa DHB has been unable to secure a New Zealand trained orthopaedic surgeon. Applicants are predominantly overseas surgeons whose registrations are subject to the approval of the Medical Council. This is a complex process and so far the DHB has been unable to appoint any overseas applicants in this regard.

ENDS

Attribute to Dale Oliff, Chief Executive

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