

LETTER FROM THE SURGEONS FROM THE CANTERBURY DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD

(74 surgeons out of a total of 80)

FOR AGREED RELEASE IN TO THE PUBLIC FORUM

Re: Ministry of Health Surgical Waiting List Policy and the Implementation Thereof

We, the undersigned surgeons from the Canterbury District Health Board, wish to make the following statement by way of publicly stating our concerns with this policy:

The Ministry of Health Policy can be summarised as follows:

1. Patients booked for first specialist surgical (outpatient) appointments must be seen within 6 months from the date of referral.
2. Patients for whom a surgical procedure/operation has been recommended and agreed should then have this procedure/operation performed within 6 months of booking. This means that the DHB should only accept for surgery the number of patients that can be treated within this time-frame.

We have no objections to Item 1 and indeed the CDHB surgical specialties are generally resourced and able to see all new and non urgent referrals well within this 6 month time frame. We do however, have significant issues with Item 2, of this Ministry of Health Policy Directive and these are:

1. The 6 month cut off of this directive has no clinical basis and is leading to more marked distortions in the provision of surgical care.
2. Some patients who have been waiting longer than 6 months have been removed from waiting lists whilst patients seen more recently and who meet similar surgical criteria are to be offered surgery within 6 months – this is not fair.
3. The plan to return patients removed from waiting lists for GP review/managed care essentially ignores the clinical diagnosis for which a surgical operation has been considered by the patient, the GP and the surgeon, as the best and in many cases the only treatment option available.
4. There are significant problems with the Clinical Priority Assessment Criteria (CPAC) scoring systems – many are significantly flawed and cannot be validated. If such scoring systems are used in the course of removing patients from surgical waiting lists then clearly this compounds the wrong.
5. Many of the of surgical specialties have examples of patients that have just been removed from their specialty surgical waiting list inappropriately when considering their diagnosis or planned surgical procedure and/or without the treating surgeon being party to the decision. Furthermore many specialties were actively managing their waiting lists so that whilst a patient may have waited for over 6 months there was still an expectation and an understanding that the planned surgery would occur.

We well appreciate that there are limits in the funding of health care. As surgeons, we have a duty and accept responsibility for, the careful and appropriate use of this funding for the management of our patients. However the relative level of funding for the provision of health care for patients in our community and who require surgical care in particular is not adequate. Currently we are working under considerable constraints both in terms of our diagnostic facilities and our surgical treatment facilities. Compliance with this directive from the Ministry of Health will deny many of our surgical patients the benefits of modern surgery

and force them to continue to live with worsening disabilities and in some cases undiagnosed and untreated conditions including tumours that will lead to premature death.

It is the unanimous opinion of all the Surgical Clinical Directors and the large majority of their surgical colleagues whose names are appended that :

1. This policy and the directive from the Ministry of Health presents us surgeons significant ethical issues in our ability to provide appropriate surgical care for our patients.
2. The Government and therefore the Canterbury District Health Board is not providing sufficient resources to look after the surgical needs and demands of the population/communities they are meant to serve.

The public need to be honestly informed of all these issues and we surgeons feel that we have a responsibility to do so for the patients we have seen and will see in the future. If patients or their relatives wish to take this issue further then they certainly need to communicate their concerns to the Canterbury District Health Board, their local Member of Parliament and/or directly to the Minister of Health – as any change can only come about by change of government policy and therefore in the Ministry of Health.

As surgeons we also wish to make an apology to all patients whose surgical investigations and/or care has been unable to be delivered, as we and they rightly expected it would, and to those patients whose care may be compromised in the future as a result of this policy.

Electronically signed by all of the following :

Surgical Clinical Directors:

Spencer Beasley, Department of Paediatric Surgery, Christchurch Hospital
Gordon Carter, Oral Health Centre incl Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery, Christchurch Hospital
Grant Coulter, Department of General Surgery, Christchurch Hospital
Mark Elder, Department of Ophthalmology, Christchurch Hospital
Phillip Godfrey, Department of Surgery, Ashburton Hospital
Mike Laney, Department of Gynaecology, Christchurch Women's Hospital
John McKie, Department of Orthopaedic Surgery, Christchurch and Burwood Hospitals
Martin MacFarlane, Department of Neurosurgery
Stephen Mark, Department of Urology
Di Poad, Department of Obstetrics, Christchurch Women's Hospital
David Shaw, Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery
Stewart Sinclair, Department of Plastic Surgery
Mark Ward, Department of Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery

Surgeons:

Cardiothoracic Surgeon

Harsh Singh

Dental and Oral Maxillofacial Surgeons

Ian Esson, Jim Worthington, Les Snape

General and Vascular Surgeons at Christchurch and Ashburton Hospitals

Philip Bagshaw, Saxon Connor, Birgit Dijkstra, Frank Frizzelle, Malcolm Gordon, David Lewis, John MacDonald, Philipa Mercer, Anthony Pierre, Justin Roake, Ross Roberts, Greg Robertson, Rob Robertson, John Utley, Malcolm Ward

Neurosurgeons

Ronald Boet, Nicholas Finnis

Obstetricians and Gynaecologists

Sharron Bolitho, Colin Conaghan, Mike East, Pippa Kyle, Helene MacNab, Peter Sykes

Otolaryngological/Ear Nose and Throat Surgeons

Rob Allison, Phil Bird, Jeremy Hornibrook, Scott Stevenson, Murray Summerfield, Chris Thompson

Ophthalmic Surgeons

Sean Every, Ainsley Morris, Rob Weatherhead

Orthopaedic Surgeons

Paul Armour, Gordon Beadel, James Burn, Jeremy Evison, Gary Hooper, Grahame Inglis, Rhett Mason, Rod Maxwell, Khalid Mohammed, Ian Penny, James Taylor, Fiona Timms, Alistair Rothwell, Andrew Vincent, David Walton

Paediatric Surgeon

Russell Blakelock, Kiki Maoate

Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons

Jesse Kenton-Smith, Howard Klein, Sally Langley, Barnaby Nye

Urological Surgeons

Peter Davidson, Sharon English, Frank Kueppers, Jane MacDonald