



ASSOCIATION OF SALARIED MEDICAL SPECIALISTS

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ASMS SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH INTO UNMET HEALTH NEED

The union for senior doctors and dentists in New Zealand's public hospitals is throwing its weight behind a research project to measure the true extent of unmet adult health need in this country.

The National Executive of the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS) has agreed to contribute \$10,000 toward the project's costs.

The research will be carried out later this year and will be led by Christchurch surgeon Phil Bagshaw, who also runs the Canterbury Charity Hospital Trust (CCHT) which provides health care to people who would otherwise struggle to receive it.

ASMS Executive Director Ian Powell says the research will provide useful information about the level of unmet need.

"Our members have first-hand knowledge of people who do not meet various thresholds for specialist treatment or surgery, and who are being referred back to their GPs," he says. "It's a very frustrating situation for doctors and dentists to be in, and of course it's a distressing one for the many patients who are missing out on treatment they clearly need."

The research project will develop a number of tools to determine unmet need and pilot these through face-to-face, telephone and web-based interviews. It aims to find out which method or combination of methods of collecting data is the most accurate and cost-effective, and then use that to regularly assess unmet health need.

Clinical Associate Professor Phil Bagshaw says there is a lot of mostly anecdotal information that suggests the level of unmet health need is significant.

"While discussion has usually focused on access to primary care and elective surgery, it is now widely accepted that there are other areas of unmet need across secondary health care services

including dental health, mental health, sexual health and disability, as well as medical and surgical specialties.”

The Ministry of Health is currently working on a way to measure unmet health need but this will have a narrower scope, looking only at those patients who have been referred to a specialist but are then sent back to their GPs for ongoing monitoring.

Phil Bagshaw says others who are missing out include patients who do not seek health care because they are put off by the cost of GP visits, GPs who exclude patients because they know they do not meet DHB thresholds for treatment, and GP referrals that are not accepted by DHBs.

He has written about the work of the Canterbury Charity Hospital, and the reason for its existence, in the latest issue of the ASMS magazine, *The Specialist*, and this can be read online at <http://www.asms.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/10735-The-Specialist-Jun15-WEB-Spreads.pdf>. As well, ASMS National President Hein Stander has written about the impact of financial and other thresholds for treatment in *The Specialist*, available from the same web link.

Phil Bagshaw is happy to be contacted by media at 03 351 9754 or 021 900 417.

ENDS



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