

Demand for free hospital care prompts building expansion

Canterbury's charity hospital is being extended to cope with growing numbers of patients.

Procedures have been cut back as there has not been enough room to accommodate patients recovering, Canterbury Charitable Hospital Trust chair and surgeon Philip Bagshaw says.

So the trust is adding to its Christchurch villa, to make a larger recovery room and changing room for staff, along with bathroom facilities for visitors.

Donations and bequests have provided the funds for the project, expected to cost up to \$400,000.

Last year, the hospital's team of volunteer health professionals carried out 1846 treatments, from general surgery to counselling and orthopaedics, at no cost to patients.

The trust has only one full-time employee, executive officer Carl Shaw; three nurses share a 1.2 full-time equivalent position. A grant pays for a part-time fundraiser.

However, the 280-person clinical team includes surgeons, nurses, technicians and anaesthetists who provide their expertise for free. Some of the team do one session a week, while others do one every few months.

Mr Bagshaw says the charitable hospital trust continues to rely on GPs making appropriate referrals of people who would most benefit from free care.

GPs don't always get it right, so the trust surveys patients on their finances and lifestyle to determine if they are needy.

Although the hospital has been operating since 2007, it appears to get little assistance from Canterbury DHB. Asked about this, Mr Bagshaw says there is cooperation with some of the Health Pathways.

Pegasus Health chief executive Vince Barry did not respond to queries about Pegasus' view of the hospital and GP feedback on the referral system.

The trust first began caring for patients from a surgical bus in 2005. It bought the villa in 2007 and services were running at "full speed" a year later, Mr Bagshaw says.

In 2012, a neighbouring property was purchased and renovated to house a dental clinic, endoscopy unit and counselling rooms.

Workload has risen annually, and Mr Bagshaw says he never envisaged the hospital would grow to its current scale. ●
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Treatments carried out at the Canterbury Charitable Hospital in 2014

Consultations and outpatient appointments	654
Counselling	462
Dentistry	318
General surgery	161
Women's health	126
Orthopaedics	67
Audio tests	31
Colonoscopy	27