



ASSOCIATE PROF PHIL BAGSHAW

ILL AND OVERLOOKED - A FIRST GLIMPSE AT THE RESEARCH ON UNMET HEALTH NEED

A research project to understand the extent of unmet health need among New Zealand adults is shining fresh light on the problem.

Project lead Phil Bagshaw, a Christchurch surgeon and Chair of the Canterbury Charity Hospital Trust, says it looks as if the situation is as serious as other studies have indicated.

"The findings from our research project support the notion that there is a massive level of unmet and unrecorded secondary health need," he says.

"We talking about nearly 300,000 people who have been told they need treatment but then find they can't access it."

ASMS contributed \$10,000 toward the project, which began last year. The first stage involved working out how best to measure unmet health need, in the absence of any agreed international standard. To do that, the project team carried out three types of population sampling - face-to-face, telephone and web-based interviews - and also embarked on a study of GPs in Auckland and Christchurch.

These studies found that approximately 9% of the public had an unmet secondary health need. The research also highlighted some of the work pressure on GPs.

"For example, we gave GPs in Auckland and Christchurch the easiest ways possible to record unmet need but even so it was a real struggle for them because they're so busy."

The results have been analysed and written up, with a view to publication and dissemination to a wider audience. Phil Bagshaw says the aim is to initiate a regular, independent national study of unmet health need in order to better understand and monitor the issues.

"It's very important that it be carried out independently," he says.

"If the Ministry of Health did it, then it would be like them setting their exam paper and then marking their own results."

He recorded his appreciation for the funding provided by the ASMS, the Canterbury Medical Research Foundation, and four medical trusts.

ASMS Executive Director Ian Powell says the research project will provide the health sector with valuable information that it needs to act on.

"Having a high level of unmet health

need simply defers the cost of health care, rather than removing it," he says.

"It's not a sustainable solution for health decision-makers to stick their heads in the sand like ostriches and pretend that people with unmet health needs will get better. What really happens is that people just get sicker if they don't get the treatment they need, and this affects their health and quality of life, and eventually places even more pressure on the public health system."

Phil Bagshaw was one of several authors of an article about health funding which appeared in the *New Zealand Medical Journal* in May 2016 and highlighted unmet health need. The other authors were Ian Powell and Lyndon Keene (ASMS), Bill Rosenberg (Council of Trade Unions), M Gary Nicholls (University of Otago - Christchurch) and Christopher M Frampton (University of Otago - Christchurch).

ASMS will bring you a fuller report of the research findings on unmet need when these become available.