

13 February 2008

Mr Stephen McKernan
Director-General of Health
P O Box 5013
WELLINGTON

Dear Stephen

Re: Pathologist Workforce Planning

In response to your letter dated 22 November:

1. We are concerned that the Ministry continues to be distracted by the insignificant differences between the College and CTA statistics on the number of pathologist trainees currently in the system. The slightly higher numbers provided by CTA does not diminish the seriousness of the impending pathologist workforce crisis in New Zealand.
2. Even if the CTA figures are used, this still leaves a shortfall of approximately 107 FTE pathologists by 2018.
3. We believe that the College workforce data are accurate, but we cannot reconcile our data with that provided by the CTA until they provide detailed information to show how they calculated their workforce projections.
4. The College is willing to provide workforce information to the HWIP, with the usual restrictions required to maintain personal confidentiality for our Fellows.
5. In summary, our data show that:
 - a. 14% of NZ pathologists work more than 60 hours / week (Australia 8.3%)
 - b. 30.2% work more than 50 hours / week (Australia 26.1%)
 - c. 32.1% report a decline in workplace morale because of work stress.

- d. Many laboratories lack adequate pathologist supervision, and in doing so these laboratories are in breach of ISO 15189, and so are at high risk of losing their accreditation.
6. Specific examples of an impending workforce crisis:
- a. There are now only 11 FTE chemical pathologists in NZ.
4 are due to retire within 5 - 10 years. Only 3 are under 40 years of age
There are 4 trainees, only one of which has indicated that they intend to remain in NZ.
The post at Waikato Hospital has remained unfilled for 6 of the past 7 years.
- b. Many of our newly qualified anatomical pathology Fellows are departing for Australia, for example:
- 2 out of 4 have left from Wellington Hospital during 2007.
 - 1 out of 3 from Auckland Hospital in late 2007.

Action Required:

1. The CTA must provide details of their workforce projection model so that the minor discrepancies cease to be a distraction from the main issue.
2. A National Framework for Pathology Training needs to be formulated to optimise the training capacity in both hospital and community laboratories.
3. We must determine the reasons for the excessive outflow of pathologists from New Zealand, and why it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit pathologists from overseas.

Yours sincerely



Dr Richard Steele
Vice-President for New Zealand
The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia