



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Middlemore Hospital staffing crisis: patients wait weeks for X-rays, CT scans**

In addition to recent reports about a maternity services crisis at Middlemore Hospital, Counties Manukau DHB is also in the middle of the worst Medical Imaging Technologist (MIT) staffing crisis the DHB has ever faced, sparking concerns that potentially life-saving diagnoses will be delayed.

There is currently a staffing shortfall of 19 full-time MITs at the DHB, which is a vacancy rate of over 27%. The DHB struggles to recruit and retain newly qualified staff who are typically drawn to the better pay and work-life balance offered to MITs overseas and in the private sector. Others are leaving behind the pressure and high costs of living and working in Auckland for work in the regions.

Middlemore Hospital is the largest trauma centre in Australasia. The DHB has therefore prioritised staffing towards acute patients, cutting out-patient examinations by up to 95%. However, as a result, patients who have been referred by GPs for X-rays or CT scans are now faced with long waits.

APEX Advocate, Luke Coxon, says: "Timely X-ray and CT scans are essential to attaining early and potentially life-saving diagnoses, including detecting the early stages of cancer."

"If the MIT workforce crisis is not fixed, it is only a matter of time until patients miss their window of opportunity for life-saving treatment because they're stuck on a waitlist for diagnostic scans."

The situation at Counties Manukau is a glaring symptom of a mounting national MIT workforce crisis, with multiple DHBs nation-wide facing critical levels of MIT understaffing.

**FURTHER INFORMATION:** Luke Coxon is available for comment on 021 904 888.

#### **ABOUT MEDICAL IMAGING TECHNOLOGISTS**

Medical Imaging Technologists (MITs, previously known as Medical Radiation Technologists, or MRTs) are qualified healthcare professionals who use ionising radiation or magnetic fields to produce diagnostic images of the body to help doctors diagnose and treat illness and injury.

MITs practice in plain films (X-ray), computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), mammography, angiography, or nuclear medicine (SPECT and PET) and around 80% of all hospital patients will be imaged by an MIT during the course of their diagnosis and treatment.

Further information is attached.

**ENDS**

# What is an MIT?

Medical Imaging Technologists (MITs, previously known as Medical Radiation Technologists, MRTs, or radiographers) are qualified healthcare professionals who use ionising radiation or magnetic fields to produce diagnostic images of the body to help doctors diagnose and treat illness and injury.

MITs practice in plain films (X-ray), computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), mammography, angiography, or nuclear medicine (SPECT and PET) and around 80% of all hospital patients will be imaged by an MIT during their diagnosis and treatment.

They hold a Bachelor of Health Science (Medical Imaging) degree and must be registered with the Medical Radiation Technologists Board (MRTB) and hold a current practising licence, which requires continual professional development to an internationally recognised standard.

Becoming an MIT requires a combination of brains, technical skill and compassion. The profession is in high demand, both in New Zealand and overseas.

MITs deal with patients of all types and ages, with differing requirements and a variety of conditions and injuries. They must perform a prompt emotional and physical assessment of the patients' needs and work alongside doctors to implement the most appropriate technology to aid in diagnosis and treatment. They are often required in operating theatres to aid in procedures such as the removal of kidney stones and the insertion of stents to widen blood vessels. They also commonly help with orthopaedic surgical procedures, in the pinning and plating of fractures and broken bones.

Radiography is a fast moving and continually changing profession. Modern developments in digital imaging technology, such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and other specialised imaging techniques and technology have resulted in MITs extending their knowledge and skills far beyond the production of 'simple' x-rays.

Some MITs train to work within and across specialist medical imaging fields (modalities), such as:

Computerised tomography (**CT** or **CAT**) is an imaging technique which produces cross-sectional images of the body using conventional X-rays. However, rather than using photographic film the X-ray beam impinges on an array of detectors as it emerges from the patient. Computer image enhancement of this beamed information allows very small changes to be detected.

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (**MRI**) uses the magnetic properties of hydrogen atoms to produce images in multiple planes without the use of harmful ionising radiation. It is of particular value in imaging the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord). It is also used to image joints, showing soft tissue detail as well as bone abnormalities.

Mammographers perform x-rays of the breast (**Mammography**), which can show changes up to two years before a lump can be felt. This early detection of small breast cancers is important in enabling early treatment.

In **Nuclear Medicine**, radionuclides emit gamma rays as they decay, and these can be detected when attached to particular pharmaceuticals, which travel to the organs to be imaged. When compared to other imaging modalities the resolution of the images is poor, but it can detect certain conditions (e.g. bone tumours) at a much earlier stage than other techniques.