MEDIA RELEASE

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Frustrated Medical Physicists Across New Zealand to Strike for an Offer

Medical Physicists, who provide essential radiation services to cancer patients, have voted to go on strike after receiving no offer to settle their multi-employer collective agreement (MECA) from their DHB employers after over seven months of negotiations.

A prime example of improved cancer care in recent years that is dependent on Medical Physicists is Stereotactic Ablative Body Radiotherapy (SABR), which has extended the life of hundreds of patients with inoperable lung cancer for whom there would have been no other treatment option.

“This is a small but crucial medical workforce that is essential to providing cutting edge cancer treatment for New Zealanders,” says David Munro, APEX Senior Advocate.

“When we bargained three years ago, we made significant progress in ensuring that this essential workforce is not lost to overseas employment opportunities. That progress is now at risk due to the DHBs failure to make an offer to settle our collective,” explains Mr Munro.

“It is so disappointing to have to strike just to get an offer,” says Mark Ashburner, APEX Union Physicists National President. “We have put a position to the employers that they understand and appear not to oppose, but we are told they cannot make an offer because it involves additional funding. The additional funding would be negligible, but in the meanwhile the DHBs’ failure to make an offer puts ever increasing strain on our workforce.”

The strike will take place from 12 March 2019 to 22 March 2019 and involves restricting work during anti-social hours; a regular feature of life for Medical Physicists.

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ABOUT MEDICAL PHYSICISTS

Medical Physicists work in Radiation Oncology and are responsible for the delivery of radiation treatment in the correct dose to oncology patients. Radiation used in radiation therapy is powerful enough to kill cancer but conversely powerful enough to do a lot of damage to patients if delivered incorrectly. It's the physicists' job to ensure that linear accelerators, other radiation sources, and complex imaging equipment is used with pinpoint accuracy to give the correct dose to millimetre precision. This involves extensive measurements when new equipment is put into use and regular quality assurance on all treatment devices. Physicists also assist radiation therapists and radiation oncologists in planning individual patient's treatment, checking that it is delivered correctly, and continually developing new forms of treatment.