

+NEWS

Bay of Plenty hospital pharmacy staff set to strike tomorrow



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Bay of Plenty acting chief operating officer Bronwyn Anstis would not comment on today's mediation, but Pharmacy Today understands the DHB has made contingency plans as pharmacy workers prepare to strike.

Hospital pharmacy staff in the Bay of Plenty will strike tomorrow after contract negotiations with the DHB around pay parity soured.

The partial withdrawal of labour by 28 pharmacists, technicians, assistants and interns working at Tauranga and Whakatāne hospitals who are members of APEX union will last from Wednesday 2 September until Wednesday 9 September.

The strike follows six months of negotiations after an “unacceptable” offer from the DHB, which would see APEX members reaching pay parity around 15 months after their hospital colleagues.

“It’s a slap in the face for this group of employees,” says APEX national advocate Denise Tairua.

“The members are frustrated and have been left with no other alternative but to take industrial action in an attempt to get an improved salary offer.”



Pharmacy staff will show up for work but, according to a letter from APEX to Bay of Plenty DHB acting chief executive Simon Everitt on August 18, they will withdraw from tasks in a range of areas.

‘It’s always been around parity’

APEX initiated bargaining on 14 January, however due to COVID-19, there were delays in receiving an offer.

Ms Tairua says members are accepting of the package overall, but the primary concern is around the size of the salary increase and the timing of the increases.

“These members have claimed pay parity now with other pharmacy workers employed across New Zealand, however the employer has offered a staged offer, which will see them reaching parity 15 months behind their [hospital] colleagues, including those who are working in the Bay of Plenty DHB pharmacy but belonging to a different union,” she says.

APEX members would accept the percentage increases if they were to achieve parity “reasonably soon”, Ms Tairua explains, “but not in 15 months”.

“They’ve seen everyone else in bargaining over the past year with increases between 9 and 12 per cent, but pharmacists are being offered 3 and 6 per cent. For technicians it’s more – technicians will receive between 6 and 11 per cent increases, but it still sees them reaching parity 15 months behind their colleagues.”

Withdrawing labour

The partial strike will involve:

- Withdrawing all labour associated with the use of phones including mobile phones and pagers, with the exception of the on-call cellphone
- Withdrawing all labour associated with processing invoices
- Withdrawing all labour associated with answering the door or hatch into dispensary
- Pharmacy system (ePharmacy) supervisors withdrawing all labour associated with trouble shooting, set up new users, and new drugs
- Withdrawing all labour associated with delivering imprest stock to wards
- Withdrawing all labour associated with the delivery, chasing charts and contacting prescribers regarding funding of monoclonal antibody medicines
- Withdrawing all labour associated with delivering controlled drugs orders to ward
- Withdrawing all labour associated with ordering or altering prescriptions for patients in hospital in home service (HITH), and new patients on HITH

Mediation unsuccessful

Today, APEX and the DHB continued negotiations, but the DHB did not budge.

Ms Tairua hopes that by going on strike tomorrow, the DHB will return to bargaining next week with an improved salary offer. Another meeting is scheduled to be held in eight days' time.

“We had a mediation session today, but the employer didn't actually have authority at the table to make an improved offer. They didn't put anything on the table,” she says.

“Their reasoning is that their hands are tied, that they have no mandate from the ministry, and this is the salary deal that they are able to offer.”

Bay of Plenty DHB declined to respond to questions to questions from Pharmacy Today, but in an emailed statement, acting chief operating officer Bronwyn Anstis states “mediation is continuing today with APEX, and out of respect for those negotiations, no further comment will be made at this stage.”

Pharmacy Today understands the DHB has contingency plans in place.