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‘We are trying to stand our ground’: BOP hospital pharmacist explains strike



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“We are trying to stand our ground and we’re simply pointing out we want equity with our colleagues”

Twenty-eight hospital pharmacy staff in the Bay of Plenty have gone on strike today after rejecting a DHB offer which would see members reaching pay parity around 15 months after their hospital colleagues.

The strike, which will last until Wednesday 9 September, sees a partial withdrawal of work from a range of areas by all members of APEX union who are pharmacists, technicians, assistants and interns working at Tauranga and Whakatāne Hospitals.

Tauranga Hospital clinical pharmacist and prescriber Adele Harrex warns more significant strike action could be on the horizon should the DHB not return to negotiations next week with a more reasonable offer.

“We’re doing a partial strike now, but there will be more action if there is no resolution,” she says.

“We are trying to stand our ground and we’re simply pointing out we want equity with our colleagues.”

APEX first initiated bargaining on 14 January. However, due to COVID-19, an offer was delayed. Overall, members are accepting of the package, but disagree with the size of the salary increase and the timing of the increases.

‘Like a kick in the guts’

Ms Harrex says APEX members didn’t want to go on strike, but receiving the offer following a long and slow process “felt like a kick in the guts”.

“No one wanted to be in this position. Because it is just a partial strike, we are still providing what we think are crucial services to our patients. We hope that no patients are affected, but we did want to let the organisation know that we’re not going to accept a delay in a pay rise, so we wanted to do something.”

Currently, the DHB’s pharmacy workers who are members of the Public Service Association are earning more than their colleagues belonging to APEX, after PSA signed a new contract with the DHB in 2018.



“We haven’t gone for anything extra; we just want our salaries to be matched with the PSA Union. All we’re asking for is the same as what PSA are getting now,” says Ms Harrex.

DHB acknowledges inequity

The proposed pay increases would see APEX members reach pay parity with their colleagues in 15 months’ time.

But PSA is renegotiating their existing contract with the DHB again in October, which could see the pay disparity widen further.

The DHB has acknowledged this inequity and are “reasonably sympathetic”, she explains, but won’t budge.

Using their voice

Ms Harrex says non-members who are not striking and continue work at full capacity are “generally supportive” of the strike.

“They’re just getting on and doing it...but their days are going to be quite busy.”

She says it was important for the pharmacy sector to use their voice to achieve pay parity.

“There’s lots of things we could ask for - nurses have got a big pay rise, but pharmacy’s been a bit forgotten. Overall, pharmacy is a small procession and we often get left behind.

“Everybody knows we’re helpful and problem solvers but we’re nothing compared to nurses in terms of volume or voice.”

Another meeting between APEX and the DHB is scheduled for Wednesday, 9 September.