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The short straw: Waikato DHB pharmacy staff begin week-long partial strike



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Waikato Hospital pharmacist Mo Tairab says it feels as if APEX members at the Waikato DHB have drawn the short straw

"We don't want to accept anything that will put us behind everyone else – we don't see that as being fair"

Thirty-four Waikato DHB pharmacy workers have started industrial action today in an effort to progress collective bargaining after receiving an “unacceptable” offer last month.

The partial strike by APEX union members who are pharmacists, pharmacy interns, pharmacy technicians, trainee pharmacy technicians and pharmacy assistants at Waikato Hospital Pharmacy and Pharmacy on Meade will be under way until Tuesday 22 September.

In a media release, APEX pharmacy advocate Denise Tairua explains [the union initiated bargaining](#) in December but is yet to receive a “reasonable” offer from the DHB.

“We’re only asking for what’s fair, which is to receive the same salaries as pharmacy workers across the country,” she says.

“After significant delays to bargaining from the DHB, it’s unacceptable that they would present such an inequitable offer. Pharmacy workers are growing increasingly frustrated and feel the only option left is to strike to receive an improved offer.”

‘Simply unacceptable’

Waikato Hospital pharmacist Mo Tairab says the offer presented to members last month was “simply unacceptable”.

“The offer that was made to us was based on an offer that was made to members of other unions two years ago,” he explains.

“It’s a bit unfair knowing that another member in a different DHB in the same job is being paid more.

“It feels like we’re getting the short straw. It almost undercuts us a little bit. We don’t want to accept anything that will put us behind everyone else – we don’t see that as being fair.”

Mr Tairab adds Southern DHB reached an agreement with APEX members earlier this year, despite initiating negotiations with the union later than Waikato DHB.

He is hopeful the strike will result in an improved offer, and members will not have to initiate further strike action.

Partial withdrawal of labour

The strike will involve withdrawing all labour associated with:

- Answering phones including cell phones or pagers, with the exception of members working in Pharmacy on Meade
- Attending wards between 9am to 10am and 3pm to 4pm with the exception of ward M5, where the pharmacist will instead withdraw all labour associated with attending the ward between 10am – 12pm
- Working overtime
- On-call
- Use of a motor vehicle for the purposes of work during Monday to Friday from 7.30am to 5.30pm
- RnR services
- Training placement students in a ward setting
- Hot topics
- In service training
- The commencement of new clinical trials
- Anti-coagulation education of patients
- Emailing chemo charts to regional hospitals at discharge
- Non-urgent medicines information queries, these will be referred to the Medicines Information Service.

Bay of Plenty strike action escalates

Earlier this month, 28 hospital pharmacy staff in the Bay of Plenty went on strike after rejecting a DHB offer which would see APEX members reaching pay parity around 15 months after their hospital colleagues.

The strike saw members of APEX union who are pharmacists, technicians, assistants and interns working at Tauranga and Whakatāne Hospitals partially withdraw their labour from Wednesday 2 September to Wednesday 9 September.

APEX issued a new, full strike notice to the DHB on Monday, 7 September, after the Bay of Plenty DHB was unable to return to negotiations with an improved offer.

The next strike will last a full 24-hour period on 22 September and will involve all hospital pharmacy staff in the Bay of Plenty who are APEX members fully withdrawing their services.