



MEDIA RELEASE

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Medical physicists commence strike action.

Medical Physicists commence strike action this week at four DHBs and action will be ongoing in all six DHBs that provide radiation oncology from Tuesday 2 June 2015.

‘Our members believe they now have no other choice but to strike if New Zealand’s first class radiation oncology service is to continue at the level New Zealanders deserve,’ said APEX advocate David Munro. ‘For their part the DHBs refuse to take their heads out of the sand and look at the situation they are facing. With astonishing short-sightedness they simply repeat the mantra that waiting lists are under control and ‘official’ vacancies are low. But even their own evidence tells a different story.’ says Munro.

Late last year the DHBs surveyed their own physicist trainees and recently qualified physicists about their future employment intentions. Despite repeated requests from APEX to the DHBs to share the results they have only been made available to the union in recent weeks. The reason is obvious. ‘The survey results 100% confirm what APEX already knows about the impending crisis but which the DHBs are determined to ignore,’ said Mr Munro. ‘100% of respondents were considering working overseas, and from amongst those who had already moved offshore intentions about returning – or not – to New Zealand were very telling. The following comment is typical:’

‘I moved to Australia as a personal career decision to gain expose to new working environments, technology, techniques and research. I would like to move back to NZ in the future but the pay disparity for an experienced medical physicist is too great to consider this a viable option at this stage. A 10% reduction in salary may be acceptable but 40-50% is just too great.’

‘It takes eight-to-nine years to train a medical physicist and in New Zealand we do that to a very high standard,’ Mr Munro points out. ‘Then once they are qualified much higher salaries overseas lure them away from New Zealand. And if that isn’t enough, offshore oncology departments head-hunt our graduates because they are so good. Basically our taxes are paying for Australian cancer treatment.’

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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. The effects of over irradiating patients can lead to burns and disfigurement, and life-threatening tissue damage, whilst under-treatment can also be fatal. It's the physicists' job to ensure that linear accelerators used in the delivery of radiation give the correct dose to millimetre accuracy. This involves extensive measurements when new equipment is put into use & regular quality assurance on all treatment devices. Physicists also assist radiation therapists & radiation oncologists in planning individual patient's treatment and checking that it is delivered correctly.
