



Minister of Health Interferes in Union and DHB Dispute Causing Huge Disruption to Patients

Thursday 14 February

The Minister of Health's interference in bargaining between unions and DHBs is causing huge disruption to patients and the medical sector.

Northland DHB and APEX, the union representing Anaesthetic Technicians, jointly agreed to attend facilitation. This resulted in a recommended settlement from the facilitator, which was accepted by APEX and rejected by the DHB.

"We understand the Minister's interference has resulted in Northland DHB rejecting a recommendation from an independent process that both parties agreed to in an attempt to find a resolution," says Luke Coxon, Advocate for Anaesthetic Technicians. "As a direct result, further strike action is now pending. We have requested Northland DHB go back to the Minister and seek his authority to agree to the ERA's recommendation. They have said they will."

In Rotorua, Lakes DHB is transferring surgical patients to other providers at an immense cost, due to strike action taken by the Anaesthetic Technicians. In mediation yesterday, the DHB came with no ability to bargain. We're willing to compromise to settle the dispute, and we estimate our proposal would cost the DHB an extra \$25,000. The cost of the strike could be in the hundreds of thousands.

"Again, we understand that it's the Minister's interference that is the problem," says Mr Coxon. "The DHB is unable to negotiate at the table without going back to the Ministry of Health."

"The Minister of Health should be supporting us to provide care to our patients," explains Mr Coxon. "Instead, he is supporting industrial unrest, disaffecting practitioners and setting them up against their DHB employers."

FURTHER INFORMATION

Luke Coxon is available for comment on 021 904 888.

BACKGROUND

The Anaesthetic Technicians at Northland DHB have been trying to address a recruitment and retention crisis. More than 30% of Anaesthetic Technician positions are vacant, requiring those remaining on the job to work additional shifts and overtime. Surgeries have also had to be cancelled due to insufficient staff numbers. Meanwhile, Anaesthetic Technician pay rates in the private sector are up to 30% higher than those in the DHB, which exacerbates staff shortages as staff leave the public health sector for better pay.

Anaesthetic Technicians are essential members of the surgical team. They work mainly in operating theatres, providing skilled assistance to the Anaesthetist. Anaesthetic Technicians check and maintain the anaesthetic machines and other related equipment, ensure appropriate equipment and drugs are available, assist with inserting airway devices and venous/arterial cannulas, and act as advocates for patients. While Anaesthetic Technicians work predominantly in operating theatres, they are called upon to work in any area where an anaesthetic may be given, including CT, MRI & radiology, ED & intensive care.