



MEDIA RELEASE

Wednesday 13 March 2019

Radiation Therapists Support Their Physicist Colleagues

Radiation Therapists are throwing their support behind Medical Physicists who are striking from 12 March until 25 March 2019. The Physicists' strike withdraws any contact with radiation or imaging machinery after 4:30pm every day.

The strike means that some treatments will be delayed and rescheduled, as it is unsafe to commence treatment without a Medical Physicist present.

Radiation Therapists will be in bargaining soon and are therefore watching the treatment of their Physicist colleagues during this dispute with a keen interest.

"We work as a multi-disciplinary team in Radiation Oncology and we all have enormous respect for the role that the various professions undertake. We know that our Physicist colleagues are constantly under recruitment and retention pressure, so we feel for them having to wait more than seven months for an offer to settle their collective agreement – still with no offer looking certain anytime soon," says Tania Fergusson, President of the Radiation Therapy division of APEX.

Whilst Radiation Therapists in some departments do routinely perform the daily run-up of some radiation equipment, it is only Medical Physicists that can resolve any problems that occur with the equipment and carry out quality control of the radiation (linear accelerator) machines.

"We are incredibly disappointed that there have been attempts by some DHBs to encourage Radiation Therapists to undermine the Physicists' strike action by working beyond their usual scope or duties during this time. We won't be doing that; we won't undermine our Physicist colleagues and we won't compromise on safety," explains Tania.

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ABOUT 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. It's the physicists' job to ensure that linear accelerators, other radiation sources, and complex imaging equipment is used with pinpoint accuracy to give the correct dose to millimetre precision. This involves extensive measurements when new equipment is put into use and regular quality assurance on all treatment devices. Physicists also assist radiation therapists and radiation oncologists in planning individual patient's treatment, checking that it is delivered correctly, and continually developing new forms of treatment.

ABOUT RADIATION THERAPISTS (RTs)

Radiation therapists use radiation to treat disease primarily those suffering from cancer. RTs work as part of a specialised team planning patient's radiation treatment using computer technology and clinical information and providing the patient with their radiation therapy using a range of high-tech treatment machines.

It's a highly skilled profession and, because cancer affects so many people, qualified radiation therapists are in high demand. RTs work in the Radiation Oncology departments in New Zealand including at six public hospitals (Auckland, Waikato, Palmerston North, Wellington, Christchurch, and Dunedin), and four private centres (Auckland, Tauranga, Wellington and Christchurch).