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GPs should be lining up around the block, too

Tuesday's [New Zealand Herald story about patients queueing at 6am](#) outside a clinic in Ōtara highlighted the dire situation with health clinics in Aotearoa.

“We shouldn’t see queues like that anywhere, let alone in a supposedly developed country like New Zealand,” says Dr Buzz Burrell, interim chair of General Practitioners Aotearoa (GPA).

Health Minister Dr Shane Reti and the Government are not interested in making real change to recruit more general practitioners (GPs), Burrell says.

“If GPs had time to line up around the corner outside Dr Reti’s office for treatment, we would. The primary healthcare system is sick. The concept of a family doctor is already dead.”

Patients all over the country have to wait weeks to see a doctor at their usual clinic, and even then they’re unlikely to see their regular doctor.

“Thank god we have walk-in clinics like Ōtara Local Doctors to pick up some of this burden. But those clinics are also being run ragged, and it’s still far too little,” Burrell says.

Because there are not enough GPs, it has become unsafe for those remaining as they try to see everyone who needs care.

“A patient in the *Herald*’s article said she could tell how stressed the clinic staff were. What you don’t know is those doctors probably spend a chunk of their spare time chasing referrals and test results,” Burrell says.

The [Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners this year published results of a study](#) showing that every 4.5 hours of patient consultations generates 3.5 hours of follow-up work, often done unpaid in evenings and on weekends.

“They never get a break. They come to work unrested and having spent no time with their own families,” says Burrell.

“And if it’s unsafe for doctors, it’s unsafe for patients.”

The primary healthcare system is designed to prevent and manage illness in the community, and to treat minor illnesses that should never end up in hospital.

“We can’t prevent illness in these conditions,” says Burrell. “Those sick people are literally out in the cold.

“And we can’t properly manage existing illnesses when we don’t have space to see our patients.”

Burrell says more GPs will quit in the coming months, largely because they no longer feel like they can help their communities.

“How can you feel like you make a difference when you’re part of a conveyor belt for a queue that runs to the end of the block?”

ENDS

Contact for comment

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We may also be able to connect you with our members who wish to comment on relevant stories – email communications@gpaotearoa.co.nz for more information.

About General Practitioners Aotearoa

General Practitioners Aotearoa (GPA) is the only independent organisation exclusively representing the voices of doctors working in general practice. We are member-funded and receive no government money. GPA formed after the demise of the New Zealand Medical Association to independently advocate for GPs. gpaotearoa.co.nz