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Latest Emergency Department pressures are the result of a vicious circle being faced on a daily basis by general practices across the country.

The General Practice Owners Association (GenPro), the national representative body for general practice and urgent care centres across New Zealand, has today commented on recent reports that some of New Zealand's hospital emergency departments (EDs) are at capacity and under increasing pressure.



GenPro's chair, Dr Tim Malloy (pictured), said, "Every day, we are seeing patients presenting at their general practice for essential health care because they are waiting unreasonably long periods for a specialist appointment at their local hospital, or even worse, they are one of the many patients who are now being declined a specialist hospital appointment despite one being deemed necessary by their GP. One of the impacts this has is that other patients are no longer able to get to see their GP for routine appointments without waiting days, or even weeks, to do so".

GenPro believes that the pressure on EDs is just one of the consequences of poor whole-of-system planning and a lack of appropriate resourcing to manage growing demand from an increasing and ageing population. Over a number of years, general practices across the country have been expected to manage the care of more and more patients whose needs would have historically been met by specialist hospital services. That continuing shift of care to general practices has come without additional resources or support.

GenPro advises that if GPs continue to face such pressures and similarly cannot access essential diagnostic or specialist services for their patients, the care and health of our communities will continue to be severely compromised and the pressure on EDs will be symptomatic of what is happening across general practice as well as being indicative of how the health system is failing New Zealanders.

Dr Malloy believes that the pressure on EDs is also impacting the ability of urgent care clinics in the community to respond to patients presenting with urgent or life-threatening illnesses and injuries. "With ambulances backed-up outside ED waiting to transfer their patients, we are often having to wait hours for an ambulance for those patients presenting in primary care but needing urgent ED or hospital care. Patients are certainly being put at risk and GPs have no choice but to care for and support those patients despite not being resourced to do so".

Describing the situation as a vicious circle, GenPro emphasises that the on-going chronic underfunding of general practice has a three-fold impact – it affects health outcomes for our communities and patients, it undermines the sustainability of our essential general practice [and urgent care] providers, and it increases pressure on our hospitals and ED departments. "This is exactly the crisis that our ED colleagues are now highlighting" says Dr Malloy.

ENDS

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