

## **Staying healthy so you don't need that cancer specialist: PHA**

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The Public Health Association (PHA) says if the New Zealand health system focussed more on keeping people healthy and getting in early, the shortage of cancer and other specialists would not be such a problem.

The comment from the PHA's National Executive Officer Dr Gay Keating comes after the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists recently warned that a shortage of cancer specialists highlights a wider and serious shortage of senior doctors across most specialties. It described the situation as 'a crisis'.

"The loss of skilled doctors to jobs off-shore is not going to go away anytime soon. But we can and should limit the number of people developing cancer and other illnesses that put pressure on the hospital staff, create waiting lists and chomp into our health dollar," says Dr Keating.

"Many people end up in hospital unnecessarily. About a quarter of trips into hospital in New Zealand are preventable. Either it could have been nipped in the bud or it shouldn't have happened in the first place. Think of the unnecessary pain and suffering, the clogged up waiting lists, the pressure on the health dollar and the overworked staff. Wouldn't it be wise to put increased emphasis on prevention, particularly during a recession when money is so tight?

"We've seen the way that getting rid of cold damp houses flows directly into improved health, lower hospital costs and fewer sick days off school. Encouraging smokers to quit and preventing children from starting, making wholesome food affordable for all, reducing the amount New Zealanders drink and having neighbourhoods in which children can safely walk to school have similar benefits not far down the track.

"The cancer and other specialist services can do so much to save lives, extend life and control pain. The most helpful thing that can be done to make sure that there are enough cancer specialists to go round is to invest in preventing cancer in the first place," says Dr Keating.

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