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Future mistakes “inevitable” given current doctor workloads

The union representing resident doctors is concerned with the safety level of patients in New Zealand and says mistakes are inevitable in the current working environment.

The statement comes after a coroner heard a man died in hospital from a tear in his aorta after an X-Ray was missed. The story can be viewed here:

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/health/9857842/Crucial-X-ray-unseen>

The New Zealand Resident Doctors Association (NZRDA) national secretary Dr Deborah Powell says it continues to work with District Health Boards (DHBs) to identify and address the safety challenges it faces. Some positive progress has been achieved since Mr Bourke's death, and further improvements are in the pipeline.

“But both the workloads and the hours resident doctors continue to be asked to work is high. Mistakes are bound to happen if doctors are overworked and tired. It is inevitable that patients will suffer in such circumstances.”

Dr Powell says the case outlined today demonstrates the needless tragedy that can be suffered by families involved. “But my heart also goes out to Dr Tan,” Dr Powell says. “Here we have a doctor working through the night and he’s rushed off his feet with 75 per cent more than the usual number of patient admissions to get through. When Dr Tan saw Mr Bourke, his symptoms were very vague and certainly not suggestive of something as serious as an aortic tear. The conditions were stacked against him. Now one of his patients has died. It’s a tragedy for all involved.”

Dr Powell says the reality is that cases like this are just symptoms of the wider problem within New Zealand hospitals. “Tragedies like this will continue to occur unless the issue of shortages and proper resourcing are addressed.

Today’s story comes just days after it was revealed the Auckland DHB plans to cut staff costs due to a \$12 million budget deficit.

ENDS

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