



Te Kaunihera
Rata o
Aotearoa

**Medical
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To the Resident Doctors Association and the 20 District Health Boards

RE: Continued Industrial Action

The Medical Council of New Zealand (Council) is required to protect public health and safety. Although Council does not see industrial disputes to be within its mandate, Council is concerned that ongoing industrial action may negatively impact public health and safety. Therefore, it is timely for me as the Chair of Council to express concern over what is clearly a dispute with both parties in seemingly well entrenched positions.

Striking Resident Medical Officers (RMOs) have highlighted a number of issues. One of great importance appears to be the need to protect the existing conditions including the guarantee of a maximum of 10 consecutive working days, along with rostered days off. This safeguard is enshrined in "Schedule 10" of the Multi-Employer Collective Agreement and is designed to minimise RMO fatigue – an issue highly relevant to both patient and health practitioner safety. We are all aware of a new union formed essentially in opposition to Schedule 10.

There is no doubt that safe staffing is a vital foundation of safe patient care. I doubt either party wishes to challenge that view. I would ask both parties to urgently develop a cooperative mechanism to make real progress on safe staffing, but in an environment that allows the Union membership to avoid strike action. I appreciate there are related issues of significant disagreement such as how roster changes are approved and introduced, but I would suggest the fundamental issue of safe staffing should be prioritised.

Continued industrial action will ultimately threaten aspects of public health and safety. Whilst I am confident life preserving services can be maintained over repetitive 48 hour stoppages, at least in the immediate future, this is not equivalent to eliminating risk of harm to patients whose health needs fall short of "life preserving" scenarios.

I would be prepared to meet with both parties to discuss these issues further.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Connolly

Chair, Medical Council of New Zealand