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Permanent chemo service ‘priceless’

WAIROA cancer patients are now travelling just minutes as opposed to hours to receive chemotherapy treatment.

The speedy access is the result of Health New Zealand nurses advocating on their behalf in the wake of Cyclone Gabrielle last February.

Within 10 days of the cyclone hitting, the Hawke’s Bay oncology nursing team were administering chemotherapy treatment in Wairoa, which was cut-off from the rest of the country, with SH2 closed south of Wairoa, says clinical nurse manager Laura Ledger.

“We had been trying to get it up and running for about five years.

“We had done a trial there, and that highlighted the need, but there was a lot to work through.

“Then, when the cyclone hit, an email was sent out asking about any essential services,” says Ledger.

“Our team jumped at the chance to get that service finally there.”

To get it up and running, Wairoa’s rural nurse specialist, Nerys Williams, helped both Ledger and associate clinical nurse manager, Karen Linley, to find all the patients, review them



CHECK-UP IN MINUTES: Rural nurse specialist Nerys Williams administers chemotherapy treatment to patient Mel Pomana.

and cluster the group for treatment. Since then, 27 patients have been through the service.

It has moved from the outpatients area upstairs to a permanent place, next to the inpatient ward.

There is stock on hand, La-Z-Boys for the patients to sit in and it will be a permanent service.

Williams has been trained by Ledger, Linley and the other oncology nurses to administer the chemotherapy. It’s the ease of access to treatment for people in Wairoa and surrounding areas that means so much to Ledger.

“We used to have a woman who would move heaven and earth to get here (Hastings) for treatment.

“The roads were flooded once, and we didn’t think there would be a chance she would make it,” says Linley.

“But we would open up the doors in the morning and there she was. She had gone off-road through a farm. For two years, she travelled here — whichever way she could.

“Then, for her final two years, she was able to finally do it with relative ease in Wairoa.

“She thoroughly enjoyed those last treatments.”

Another patient, Mel Pomana, previously needed to do at least a three-hour round trip to Hastings for her treatment.

“It is life-changing for me to get chemotherapy at home in Wairoa.

“It’s made the world of difference to me — I would have to go in a van that travels five times a week to Hastings.

If you weren’t there when the van left, then that was too bad, and there would be no chemotherapy treatment that week, Mrs Pomana explained.

“Now, the stress has gone, it is so much easier.”

Health New Zealand general manager of Whānau and Communities Penny Rongotoa says extending the service to Wairoa, where up to eight people can receive chemotherapy in a day, is priceless.

“It reduces the stress, and has other health benefits, such as patients being more hydrated and warmer, so it is easier to administer the treatment.

“Patients are making valuable connections with each other too, meaning they don’t feel so isolated,” says Rongotoa.

To ensure the success of this programme, Williams is supported by the oncology nursing team, who travel to Wairoa as needed, says Rongotoa.

“Seemingly small things like this lead to big outcomes in terms of recovering from cancer.”

‘No quick fixes’ for flood protection, says mayor

WAIROA will find a solution for future flood protection, but it must be the right decision and not rushed, says Wairoa Mayor Craig Little.

“The urgency around progressing flood mitigation options for Wairoa is acknowledged, but it is too important to just tick the boxes to make a quick decision,” says Mr Little.

Wairoa’s Flood Protection Stakeholder Group members continue to work through critical flood-mitigation options, with minimising cultural impact a key consideration.

Mr Little said while the \$70 million earmarked by the Government for flood mitigation for Wairoa has a specific brief of shifting Wairoa’s 627 Land Category 2A properties to 2C and in the future Land Category 1, a holistic approach was needed.

“The solution may be raising houses along with a spillway or stop bank.

“We need to consider all the effects of any decision-making.

“Some people’s homes and properties will be impacted by

flood-protection work, and we need to consider the effects this will have on people’s lives.

“This isn’t just about putting up a stop bank or digging a spillway, the ramifications on our communities and people are huge, and we need to get it right.

“If we don’t get it right, we could create bigger problems than we already have.

“We know it is frustrating to remain in Land Category 2A while the flood protection options are being worked through.

“We are committed to a solution and have asked the Hawke’s Bay Regional Council to move us to 2C to give certainty to our community and take the pressure off rushing flood protection decisions.

“It is unbelievable we are still sitting in limbo in 2A, and I will continue to lobby to get us shifted to 2C.”

The stakeholder group has asked for a global approach to Wairoa’s flood mitigation.

“We need to consider all the effects of any decision-making. Some people’s homes and properties will be impacted by flood-protection work, and we need to consider the effects this will have on people’s lives.”

— Mayor Craig Little

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