



Lauren Berry, Helen Russell, Alison McDowell, Sarah Dennison, Diane King, Raghdah Al Ameri, Mariel Trejo, Sam Hill, absent Alice Ward

## Experts in patience

Working at the cold face of a global pandemic is not for everyone, but for the Patient Affairs team – this is where their expertise, adaptability and most importantly, their patience, was invaluable to Southern DHB.

Based at Dunedin Hospital, the team of nine were quickly recognised as an essential service, managing a heavy load of enquiries and patient screening throughout the COVID-19 Alert Levels.

"The first couple of weeks were very hectic," says Diane King, Team Leader Patient Affairs. "In a period of five days, we screened 2637 individuals. The most we did in one eight hour shift day was 663."

The environment was tense at times, but Diane says it was important to remain calm and professional.

"We were all adapting to the circumstances as they changed, and it was our role to provide reassurance and guidance to our patients, public and fellow staff members. At times that was a challenge, particularly when you've been working long hours, but this is what we're trained to do."

Now things have settled, Diane feels optimistic about the team's new normal. "During lockdown, we had to resolve roadblocks really quickly and in turn, this has streamlined some of our services using platforms such as telehealth and telephone interpreter services."

## Second anniversary for Bowel Screening Programme

In the two years since it began, Southern DHB's National Bowel Screening Programme has detected 177 cases of bowel cancer across the district. A further 1267 people have had polyps removed, many of which could have developed into cancer over time.

"These numbers are reflective of lives saved and families spared losing loved ones," says the Programme's Clinical Leader, Dr Jason Hill. "This programme will have long-term positive effects – by detecting and treating cancers early, we will reduce the future bowel cancer burden in our community."

Participation rates remain high in the South at 73% overall, compared with 61% nationally. Notably, Māori

participation is at 75% in the South – considerably higher than the national rate of 55%.

Residents who received test kits in the mail before or during lockdown should complete and return them as soon as possible, as they have a six month expiry date.

Test results were still being processed throughout the lockdown, and those who returned positive results are now being offered colonoscopies. Currently, there is a median wait time of 23 days, within the national target timeframe of 45 days.

The National Bowel Screening Programme is free for those aged 60-74 who are eligible for publicly-funded health care.



Genevieve Cowley, Emma Bell, Laura Bane



### Options for anyone in crisis is to:

- Call or text 1737 for free counselling, anytime
- Call the Southern DHB Crisis Mental Health Emergency Service – 0800 467 846
- Call 111

## Mental health providers work together post-COVID

*From Adell Cox – Director of Allied Health, Mental Health, Addictions and Intellectual Disability, Southern DHB*

We are aware that many of our whānau and community are facing challenges as the effects of COVID-19 continue to impact on people's lives in ways that for some will have been devastating.

Feeling distressed and overwhelmed is normal but with good support, resources and information most people will recover.

We are working proactively with community services, agencies and health providers – and by acting early we are aiming to prevent an increase in mental distress and to ensure that needs are being met.

The main message we want to share with people in the community is: if you need help, reach out. There is support for you. It is natural and understandable to have a range of emotions at this time, and these may go up and down. This is normal and you are not alone.

People can call or text 1737 for free counselling, anytime. There are also many excellent resources available online, for example on the Mental Health Foundation website, and platforms such as [www.AllRight.org.nz](http://www.AllRight.org.nz)





John Kennedy takes pictures of his wife's eye using a smartphone image adapter device

# Telehealth empowering eye patients

Innovation in teleophthalmology is revolutionising the way patients can be treated from the comfort of their own home.

Southern DHB Dunedin-based Ophthalmology Registrar Dr Sheng Chiong Hong has been a pioneer in this field, having co-founded oDocs in 2014 – a social enterprise start-up helping optometrists identify eye damage and restore eyesight to the blind with smartphones.

Now, he's using this innovation to empower his patients and their families.

Jennifer Kennedy from Winton had a severe ulcer in her cornea (infection of the eye) and was initially admitted for intensive treatment for the sight-threatening condition. Upon discharge, she was given the option to continue the monitoring of her eye via telehealth.

*"Normally we would have to review the patient's condition every 24/48 hours, which would mean a visit to a clinic every day. With telehealth, we have managed to monitor her subsequent treatment remotely."*

A smartphone anterior segment-imaging device was given to her husband John, who was trained on how to take pictures of Jennifer's eye and perform a vision acuity test daily. The results were sent to Dr Hong for review daily and treatment advice provided over the phone.

"The goal of teleophthalmology is to bring equity to eye care in addition to saving time and reducing the need to travel," says Dr Hong. "A picture of the eye is always better than a thousand words, and we can go one step further by

performing live tele-retinal examinations with our patients."

Dr Hong was recently appointed to be on the committee for the NZ Branch Royal Australia and New Zealand of Ophthalmology (RANZCO) Teleophthalmology guideline development committee.

"We intend to conduct an analysis on the cost-effectiveness of implementing a national teleophthalmology programme in New Zealand."

His ultimate goal is equally ambitious and inspiring. "My mission is to end preventable blindness by making eye care more accessible and affordable for everyone."

## Board Update



Dave Cull, Chair

It seems incredible we are halfway through 2020, as so much has happened, yet the next six months show no signs of slowing down.

Top of mind for many is how we manage the isolation and quarantine of New Zealand citizens and residents returning home, and news the Southern district may be called upon to host some of these facilities as our next steps in our nationwide fight against COVID-19.

No decisions have yet been made, but Southern DHB and WellSouth PHO are working with the All of Government team to develop plans, should this occur.

While Queenstown has the hotel infrastructure, Dunedin has a stronger health infrastructure, so our preference is that any facility be in Dunedin. We need to find a way to support the rights of returning New Zealanders, while protecting the health of our people in Southern.

Meanwhile, on 23 July there will be a Public Meeting in Cromwell about the location of primary birthing facilities in Central Otago/Wanaka. Thank you to the 300 people who have made submissions so far. I encourage you to attend the Public Meeting – from your input, the Board in September will receive a paper outlining the options, and identifying the preferred option.

The long-awaited Health and Disability System Review Final Report has been made public, with recommendations for the government to strengthen equity, sustainability and outcomes in health care. Many of its key principles align with the directions we are already taking to build the Southern Health system. This gives us confidence to redouble efforts to better integrate and streamline the delivery of care across primary and secondary sectors, and strengthen public health functions.

The new Dunedin Hospital project continues, with demolition on the former Cadbury site. Behind the scenes, Southern DHB staff (both management and clinical) and members of the Community Health Council have been providing expert advice that will contribute towards the design of the new hospital.

My thanks to our staff and to you, our Southern people, for your continuing efforts and support at this busy time.

## New Dunedin Hospital progress



- Demolition of the former Cadbury distribution warehouse has been completed. The next focal point in the large demolition project, managed by Ceres NZ, is north across St Andrews Street with removal of the former Ministry of Social Development and Otago Polytechnic buildings on the Wilson's carpark block. Simultaneously, work is underway in 'soft stripping' the main Cadbury factory building. This involves the removal of asbestos and factory plant that remains inside. Consent for the full demolition of the Cadbury Factory has been submitted.
- A major milestone in the project has been reached with the approval of the detailed business case by the Southern Partnership Group (SPG). "This step was a significant one and was some years in the taking," SPG chair Pete Hodgson said. It now goes into a consultation process before going to Cabinet. Once approved, an implementation business case will be developed to set out how the hospital will be build.

## Natural history footage made in southern on hospital screens

If you've been in Dunedin, Southland or Lakes Hospitals lately you may have noticed a few more TV screens around than usual, sharing important information with our patients and staff.

Patients in waiting rooms can also enjoy the best of the Southern region on display, thanks to a partnership with Dunedin-based production company Natural History New Zealand (NHNZ), who are world leaders in producing natural history documentaries.

NHNZ loved the idea of displaying the best of Southern nature in our Southern DHB facilities, and have supplied one of their most popular and critically acclaimed series 'Our Big Blue Backyard', to view in waiting areas. The series takes viewers on a journey under New Zealand's coastal waters and gets up close and personal with the incredibly varied wildlife to be found.