



Media release from the General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand

New Zealand should heed UK concerns with physician associates, invest in growing workforce

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New Zealand should heed British concerns with physician associates and invest in growing the number of GPs, rather than spending time and money writing regulations to create a lesser role.

“It’s telling that the British Medical Association (BMA) committee [voted in favour of stopping](#) hiring physician associates in general practice, and for existing roles to be phased out,” said Dr Angus Chambers, Chair of General Practice Owners Association of Aotearoa New Zealand.

The British vote came on the same day that New Zealand doctors, nurses, practice owners and their professional bodies called on the government to pause regulation of physician associates to fill workplace shortages.

“Similar concerns are being aired in Britain and New Zealand because physician associates are a distraction from focussing on the root problems in our primary health system – underfunding, which results in under resourcing due to insufficient retention and recruitment. That’s why GPs are retiring, general practices are closing, reducing their services, and exiting after-hours care. And that’s why patients are waiting weeks for appointments, can’t enrol with their local GP, and hospital emergency departments have long wait times.

“Writing regulations to support the establishment of physician associates is a political diversion from tackling these fundamental problems.

“GenPro doesn’t want to criticise the work of physician associates, many of whom contribute to general practice patient care, but is frustrated by the government’s willingness to support PA regulations when it is doing nothing to help fix the broken funding model impacting patient care in our communities.

“GenPro supports a multi-disciplinary approach to patient care and recognises the crucial roles that different staff perform. This is not about job patch protection as some claim, but we are concerned at the government choosing to invest now in this nascent workforce, rather than in GPs, which are in crisis.

“This short-term approach appeals because it gives the appearance of driving down costs, but is instead a diversion from the importance of supporting general practices, which contribute more in the long term through, for example, reducing demands on hospitals.

“The government should focus on properly funding general practice so we can rebuild our depleted and over-stretched work force, rather than wasting time and money on regulating a new profession when there is a fit-for-purpose existing solution.



“The government must as a matter of urgency increase its support of primary healthcare, overhaul the current out-of-date funding model, and help increase the supply of medical professionals into primary healthcare,” said Dr Chambers.

GenPro, which represents about half of all general practices in Aotearoa, is ready to work with the Minister of Health and the Health NZ Commissioner to develop the solutions needed.

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