

Blog: 08.05.22

Well there's good news, excellent really, and bad news to report now.

It's pretty open secret that Dr Mick Eason has been having a very hard time battling a type of early leukaemia since his admission to hospital just after last Christmas. He was in there a long time. We were very, very worried for him but the good news is that the procedure has worked. His bone marrow transplant from a family donor has his white blood cells zinging again and he is now able to fight off infections by himself. It is a very intensive experience as a few of our own patients report whereby the inside of the bones that produce all our blood cells are absolutely bombarded with strong chemical drugs to kill all the cells, not just the cancerous lines, and then the donated ones are injected into the body to hopefully start making new cancer free blood. I wouldn't like to have to go through it at all as it is a very tough, isolating and miserable experience, but it is lifesaving. The new cells are working for Dr Mick superbly and on that front he is doing fine. He has avoided the inevitable transformation from the early beginnings of leukaemia to an acute aggressive untreatable form which could have happened at any time and surely would have happened sometime this year.

The bad news is that his red blood cells, bystanders if you like in the process, are being very slow to recover and he is still very pale and anaemic. While yes, he can get by on transfusions, the medical wisdom is for doctors to be very restrained with these, to force the body to recover. The ability to make the needed red blood cells which transport the oxygen around the body, so they give him just enough to keep going. I would have thought the extremely low levels of hemoglobin they aim at were below what someone could survive with! And so he is very tired still. Despite the extreme tiredness and paleness, and with his usual cheerful humility he does say he managed his first 9 holes of golf with his wife Hilary this week with a cart and puffing along the greens!

How he managed with that low a level of hemoglobin is a tribute to his resilience recover, and the great care he is getting from Auckland Haematology doctors, nurses and his family. So he has beaten the illness, but is still on the recovery path.

How long it will take, no-one knows, but he will get there, that we now know.

In the meantime he is going to take another three months off work, as it's just too tough on him to try to do all the things doctors need to do to look after patients, and dream about managing 18 holes of golf and improving his handicap!

Not being able to taste things and being so sick he couldn't eat has done wonders for his weight and improved his sore knees no end and I think he can't wait to try them out properly! He mightn't always look it but our Dr Mick has always been very fit until now, playing golf, tennis, biking and skiing as often as he can. Even his holidays always seem to be very active, biking trails, tramping or kayaking around bays and islands.

He will be back at the surgery. We really mean that. His surgery is still his surgery and we are keeping it like that until he comes back.

We don't want to lose him, and neither I'm sure do his patients. When and how much we do not know yet.

In the meantime I'm here and so is Dr Dominc Smith who has joined us permanently. Dr Dominic has been looking after his patients mainly and will continue to do so. Also Dr Ranche Johnson has joined us permanently on Fridays. She is the new Clinical Director of our PHO which is a half time position and she also works for the Royal College of General Practitioners conducting the final examinations for Fellowship one day a week. This relieves me and I have now stopped seeing patients on Fridays again unless we run into another resurgence of covid-19 or it's followed by a lot of influenza like NSW and Queensland had. Fridays then are freed up for business work I have been doing in the weekends. Weekends more for recovery :)

We are still hunting hard for a permanent and experienced fulltime GP to replace Dr Latu, advertising here in NZ and overseas and being our usual fussy selves about wanting someone who cares deeply about their patients and is committed to quality medicine. We are managing here so shorthanded because of the great support team behind the doctors, and the patience and understanding of our patients.

It worries me too about when we can get back to seeing patients when they want to be seen at the surgery. I too, am worrying about patients I haven't seen for a long time and really loving it when I do have a chance to catch up with them face to face. We are being a bit more liberal about who we see at the surgery and seeing more people in the surgery for consultations but we are still trying to dodge Covid -19as having it at the surgery will shut us down for 2-3 weeks which is not helpful to anyone.

It's all about balancing the needs of a few against the needs of everyone. I'm still going to screen patients by telephone until at least the end of May, but I am more open to requests for face to face consults. I see patients at the surgery 11-1pm and after 4pm each day, dressed up in PEP gear.

On the other side, I am being very very careful after hours, going nowhere and doing nothing outside some very carefully planned food shopping, and visits from and to my grand children. [Like all families with young children they have had covid-19 and there is little threat there. It was just return to kindy on Monday, sick by Wednesday.] I've got good at online shopping though! And like all my patients who have talked about it we all just want to get back to something like a normal life. But I can't yet until I know we have adequate medical cover for our patients if I get sick.

So I dream of holidays, of weekends fishing, of being able to go out to restaurants, even going to the cinema's. And of getting a phone call from a good GP wanting to join us!

It will happen, ma te wa, be safe and we will get through this together.

Any cards or notes for Dr Mick, please send them to the surgery and we will send them on to him. When he came in on Friday for the first visit since getting sick to see us, it was clear he was missing us and his patients enormously.

Drs Jacqueline, Dominic and Ranche, nurses Paulette, Rachael, and Kathy, Practice Manager Meriana, and receptionists Ana, Royalene and Jamie with the occasional help of Jane and our other Rachael.