

Blog 2nd December, 2022

It doesn't feel like December as I write this with a wool cardigan on and a southwesterly wind outside. Two years ago at this time we hadn't had any significant rain for two months and headed into a drought with dire exhortations about being careful with water and threats of restrictions. Now the Hunua watercare lakes are overflowing and in any rain they are releasing water. It is rather unpredictable. I hope all of you with Christmas-New Year holidays planned, especially those camping, tramping and at the beaches do get lots of calm skies and warm temperatures.

We will be open the three days that are not statutory holidays between Christmas and New Year, and after New Year. While it's not our regular routine service and with only one doctor, nurse and receptionist, it runs more like an A and E. We start as usual from 8am and we tend to book up from there rather than accept bookings ahead. When we finish we go home. After all emergencies like appendicitis and chest pains don't care that it's Christmas and as we know our patients, and have all their most recent notes to hand, we can provide not only faster but better care. And there will not be a 4-8 hour wait! Prices too are the same as usual, not inflated 'after hours' rates.

I don't think I'm alone when I say I will be glad to see the end of 2022. It has not been a good year. Actually it's been a horrible one. Losing Dr Mick, especially after all he went through was the worst part, but the pressure of coping with this year's pandemic by already tired and depleted staff made it very hard. But I am extremely proud of how well our team did, and how we managed to look after our patients through it all, and how we did not close like many practices around us did.

I am looking forward to the New Year. We do have some changes planned. Our IT system despite it costing us \$48k/year is obsolete because of decisions made by Spark, after they purchased our provider Appserv, so we need to change over to a Microsoft base, at considerable expense to us of course. At the same time we will review this website format and at least get to fully update our website with new photos!

We are still hoping to do the front carpark so that false 'drain' put in by our previous owner, becomes a real drain and we don't host a lake there every time it rains.

We have new team members too. Te Marino Tautari who is a trained Healthcare assistant has been helping out Paulette and Racheal our nurses until she can start her training as a nurse. We have another Healthcare assistant, Mema, around the practice who is a part of Dr Lance O'Sullivan's chronic care team who you also might see and wonder what she does. She is in weekly contact with a large group of patients with serious and multiple medical problems, to try and help them successfully navigate their way through the Healthcare systems and hopefully get them onto the road to better care. You will see Dr O'Sullivan himself in and out at times managing other members of his team that are based at our surgery and occasionally helping out our

doctors especially if I'm on leave.

He has bases in Pukekohe and Tauranga for his group Mai Health as well and acts as a consultant to a number of marae health clinics too, so no, we can't capture him fulltime as much as we would like to.

Racheal will continue to work Thursdays and Fridays as a Nurse Prescriber, and be available for consultations in her own right as she spends next year finishing off her Masterate in Nursing which gives her more knowledge so she can work independently as a Nurse Practitioner with her own group of regular patients.

Dr Ranche Johnson will be continuing to work on Fridays with us, and is building a group of patients who like to see her, as well as shouldering some of my teaching load.

Dr Dominic Smith is working fulltime, and will be shifting to working Wednesdays but having Thursdays off at the beginning of February. After all we do long days without much in the way of breaks, and on top of that there are the educational sessions and conferences we attend to stay right up to date as well as lots of reading, reviewing our laboratory results, hospital discharge and specialist letters and all the work they generate for us, as well as emergency and terminal care consultations that come out of regular clinic hours. None of us work only 40 hours a week, and with the worsening shortage of GPs, I cannot see this improving at all.

We are going to be stricter about the timing of consultations as otherwise we are running later and later which makes it very hard for those in the waiting room waiting to be seen. These are allocated at 15 minutes total for face to face consults and 10 minutes for telephone consultations. Longer appointments can be booked just as easily as standard consultations and while the time is doubled, the cost is not. To keep people to the time they have booked, overruns will be charged.

We have been very lenient recently because after not being able to come in during Covid-19 and see a Doctor patients have a backlog of issues they want to discuss. We can't do this anymore. If we don't get strict about this, our seeing less patients in a day would just lead to higher consultation costs or our staff would not get paid and neither would the rent. Despite marked wage rises we are doing our best to hold the costs down with the high inflation out there, as food goes up and up, petrol prices don't seem to drop down much at all.

The cost of rents and mortgages look to soar with the Reserve Bank thinking it can stop inflation that comes in from overseas by adding to it here by putting up the basic rate that it charges to banks [OCR]which they then pass onto us at a higher rate again!

2023 is going to be a tougher year for us in NZ as even if we actually managed to contain covid quite well, and spend far less per person than nearly every other country, and kept most people in jobs and the economy going, others like USA and Britain didn't and our dependence on them to sell to and import from means we suffer their mismanagement too. The Ukraine war continues to cost ordinary people in Europe a lot in heating and food costs, even if their banks and the energy companies are posting record profits and their inflation is much higher than ours.

If you are having problems financially, please arrange to talk with Meriana, our Practice Manager in confidence. She can help. Please don't just walk out without paying and risk your debts being sent to a credit agency for collection. Please make arrangements with the receptionists first if you cannot afford to pay at the time of consultation. Not only do we get less than half what we are owed if we do eventually get something through the debt collectors but it ruins your credit history for years which has overflows onto whether someone is prepared to rent to you, or allow a hire purchase etc which just worsens the poverty cycle - it is too easy to get caught up in. We don't want to add to those woes, but primary healthcare is not free as some people seem to think. It is subsidised, not free. We have staff wages, equipment renewals and updates, taxes and rent to pay too. We will always see a patient if it is a life or death matter but we don't have to see even registered patients if it is not.

While we cannot remedy the ills in the system, we can concentrate on doing what we want to do which is to provide the best medical care we can to patients who value their health.

Have a good Christmas and best wishes for the New Year. I hope we can all get some rest, relaxation and joy back into our lives, and whakapohane [making a very rude gesture] to 2022!

Jacqueline and all the team at Tiakina Te Ora.