

MEDIA RELEASE

29 July 2008

Aged Care Providers Sound Warning

Community-based and rural aged care providers could become a thing of the past unless they themselves are treated with care, says the industry organisation that represents them – HealthCare Providers of New Zealand.

The warning from HealthCare Providers follows the recent closure of the Belhaven Rest Home in Parnell and the introduction of District Health Board managers into three rest homes in Waitemata, Levin and Christchurch.

HealthCare Providers Chief Executive Martin Taylor said today: “Most of these rest homes are small facilities or rural providers. Belhaven had just 16 beds and generally these sorts of facilities are located close to where residents’ families live. They are often located in smaller centres or suburban areas where they integrate into the local community.”

He said the wider community as well as funding providers needed to support these smaller facilities. “We need to support these types of facilities whilst also ensuring quality service delivery. The current auditing systems are perfectly adequate to achieve that.”

“There is no evidence to support what could be a more punitive approach. In fact care has been improving since 2003 and average certification lengths have been increasing. We need to see how we can continue improving outcomes and, at the same time, ensure the survival of smaller and rural providers.”

In response to recent calls to double or treble the number of audits in the aged care sector, Mr Taylor added: “This type of knee jerk reaction will add

little to the quality of care but will take time and resources away from residents. A move of this nature would reflect regulatory panic not leadership.

“The economics of aged care these days are such that a facility of less than 40 beds is barely viable and yet smaller communities and rural areas cannot support larger facilities. We need to find ways of assisting all facilities to remain viable for the benefit of our elderly.

“Lapses such as that at Belhaven cannot be and are not condoned. However, things need to be kept in perspective: Belhaven was a certified provider of health services, just like a private surgical hospital or a DHB hospital. Belhaven was closed after just one case of abuse despite the fact it never had any abuse before and its policies and procedures had been approved by the Ministry of Health and the DHB as late as September 2007.”

“Compare this with sentinel events that happen regularly in our hospitals, where to date 137 patients have unnecessarily died as a result of poor procedures and mistakes. To the best of my knowledge no DHB or manager, or doctor or nurse, has been issued with a cessation order. The whole purpose of sentinel procedures is to encourage openness so that events can be investigated and actions taken to improve the level of care.

“In the case of Belhaven the response has been more akin to naming, blaming and shaming than learning, training and continuously improving. Patient safety is paramount, and where problems arise they need to be addressed, but closure should be an absolute last resort. Similarly, additional and often onerous procedures or requirements imposed by the DHB or the Ministry on such facilities resulting in more cost will also likely lead to closure.

“Often in smaller facilities and rural communities staff have been there a long time, they know the residents and their families well. They live in the same community, shop at the same supermarket and their children go to the same schools. DHB and Ministry policies need to be flexible enough to ensure these

providers remain open. Supporting smaller providers is the same as supporting our small and rural communities,” Mr Taylor said.

HealthCare Providers New Zealand is the leading aged care representative organization in the country. It represents 525 aged care providers out of 757, or 80 percent of the sector by beds.

For further information:

Martin Taylor

Chief executive, HealthCare Providers of New Zealand

027 453 5348