MEDIA STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE,
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URGENT ACTION NEEDED ON PALLIATIVE MEDICINE SPECIALIST WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

“New Zealand is desperately short of palliative medicine specialists and faces a crisis in that workforce within five years unless something is done urgently to address the situation,” says Ian Powell, Executive Director of the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS).

“Senior doctors providing end-of-life care tell us that 55 palliative medicine positions exist for specialists around New Zealand, spread between community services such as hospices and within hospitals. Of these positions, 22% are currently vacant and within the next five years a further 42% of the palliative medicine specialist workforce is due to retire.”

Mr Powell says 30 new palliative medicine specialists are needed within five years just to maintain services at their current levels – without taking into account the impact of New Zealand’s aging population and the increasingly chronic and complex illnesses that specialists in all fields of medicine are dealing with.

“The number of specialist palliative positions needs to expand by about 34% in the next five to ten years to create a total workforce of 74 palliative posts. This isn’t just a wish-list of things that would be nice to have – it’s what the country needs if we are to properly look after people nearing the end of their lives.”

Mr Powell says palliative medicine specialists have advised the ASMS that many services currently provided are not sustainable with their current workload and level of specialist cover. For example, 40% of district health boards (DHBs) either have no specialist cover or only partial. In addition, recruiting from overseas is difficult as other countries also have a shortage of palliative medicine specialists.

“The reality for the Government, Health Workforce New Zealand and the DHBs is that we need to train more palliative medicine specialists. That means increasing the number of fully funded
medical registrar training positions from the nine that are currently available to at least 14 positions. This would still not meet the need that is become more and more apparent but at least it would be a step in the right direction.”

ENDS

Ian Powell
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For further information – Ian Powell is currently overseas but is happy to be contacted on 021 445 521 (keeping in mind the time difference between New Zealand and New Orleans); or Communications Director Cushla Managh, 021 800 507 or cm@asms.org.nz