SHORTAGE OF PAEDIATRIC SURGEONS

“Paediatric surgeons are struggling to keep up with the level of need in New Zealand’s communities, and are working short-handed,” says Ian Powell, Executive Director of the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (ASMS).

“ASMS members who are paediatric surgeons tell us that New Zealand is about 20% short of the number needed. This is a small, highly specialised group within the medical workforce so a 20% shortfall is very significant, especially when you consider they are dealing with some of the smallest and most vulnerable members of our communities.”

Paediatric surgeons Spencer Beasley and Brendon Bowkett say in the latest ASMS magazine, *The Specialist*, that it’s a continual uphill struggle to train and retain enough paediatric surgeons in this country.

New Zealand and Australia share a training programme, with trainees selected on merit by a single body. There’s no quota of trainees from each country, which Spencer Beasley says is an issue for New Zealand.

“New Zealand trainees have to do some of their training in Australia and because they tend to be very good, they then get offered jobs in Australia. It’s a very attractive option for them because the centres are bigger and better resourced, they will be doing less on-call work and they have the ability to earn more.”

Brendon Bowkett says that in the past year, seven people have been taken onto the advanced paediatric surgery training scheme but six people have left or been removed from the programme. He estimates there are 12 or 13 paediatric surgeons in New Zealand but says more are needed.
Many paediatric surgeons, including himself, would like to do more preventative and rehabilitative work but that’s not possible given the current shortage.

Ian Powell says that like other senior doctors within the medical workforce, paediatric surgeons are over-stretched and dealing with issues of workload, fatigue and stress.

“This is yet another example of a small but essential medical specialty that is under pressure, and the Government and its agencies need to work with paediatric surgeons to figure out long-term solutions to address this situation.”


ENDS

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