



## **Surgical volunteerism in New Zealand: catching patients who fall through the cracks**

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Delegates to the 81<sup>st</sup> Annual Scientific Congress (ASC) of the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons have been told that the Canterbury Charity Hospital Trust (CCHT) is helping address unmet need for surgery and other secondary healthcare in the Canterbury region of New Zealand.

Mr Philip Bagshaw, a General Surgeon at CCHT, said that some District Health Boards in New Zealand do not provide, or provide very restricted, elective surgical services for such common surgical disorders as groin hernias, haemorrhoids, varicose veins and pilonidal sinuses.

“To address this growing problem in New Zealand, the CCHT opened an exclusively community funded and largely volunteer staffed day hospital in Christchurch in 2007,” Mr Bagshaw said. “This provides free surgery and some medical care for Canterbury patients who are refused public hospital treatment and are unable to pay for private care.”

“Surgeons, physicians, anaesthetists, nurses, technicians and support staff from Christchurch and around New Zealand work as unpaid volunteers. CCHT provides specialty services in General Surgery, Gynaecology, Ophthalmology, Plastic Surgery, Orthopaedics, Hand and Foot Surgery. And since the local earthquakes, mental health services have been introduced. At the moment, dental and endoscopy services are being added.

“Large and increasing numbers of patients are assessed and treated each year. The volume and type of work done varies to reflect changing need, and resource availability.”

Mr Bagshaw reported that charitable trusts have also been established in Auckland and Taranaki to address unmet need there, and others are being considered for other parts of New Zealand.

“The CCHT model is successful in addressing some of the unmet surgical and medical need. It is an ethical imperative that surgeons work with their communities to mitigate this increasing problem,” he said.

This year’s ASC, with the theme ‘The Making of a Surgeon’, runs from 6 to 10 May and is being held at the Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre. Approximately 2,500 delegates from Australia, New Zealand and around the world are attending.

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