

Memo

To:	Primary Care Stakeholders	From:	Pauline McGrath, Group Director of Operations Dr Kate Grimwade, Chief Medical Officer
Date:	Wednesday 18 December		
Subject:	Whakatāne Obstetrics and Gynaecology Service		

Overview

Due to staffing shortages, from mid-January 2025, Whakatāne Hospital will temporarily move to a primary birthing service. It's anticipated that this could take at least 12 months while staff recruitment takes place to enable a return to secondary birthing services.

This means that people with low-risk pregnancies can birth at Whakatāne Hospital under midwife care, however, people who have increased risk of needing intervention during birth will need to birth at Tauranga Hospital. Outpatient antenatal care will continue at Whakatāne Hospital with the support of Tauranga specialists.

This change is required to ensure the safe care for whānau experiencing a pregnancy while Health New Zealand recruits additional specialist staff. Clinical safety for pregnant people and babies is the key priority during this time.

Primary birthing services are provided by midwives and includes caring for low-risk pregnancies and conducting vaginal births. Secondary birthing services are those which require obstetric consultation, or obstetric intervention such as instrumental birth, caesarean section, management of major obstetric bleeding, and repair of complex perineal tears.

Those needing, or likely to need, secondary care for their birth will be identified during pregnancy and their birth arranged to be at Tauranga Hospital. A person who develops a need for secondary care during labour or presents late with high risk will undergo an emergency transfer to Tauranga Hospital. Transport and accommodation arrangements will be provided for patients and whānau as needed.

There will be the option to birth at Bethlehem Birthing Centre if a person has some risk but may be able to birth safely without a specialist as the Centre is located close to Tauranga Hospital in the event of a complication.

Most gynaecological care will also be moved to Tauranga Hospital except for some day case surgery and some outpatient clinics. The termination of pregnancy service will continue to be available, but people may need to travel to Tauranga or Rotorua.

Background

Due to longstanding vacancies at both Whakatāne and Tauranga hospitals, there have been ongoing challenges in providing stable, sustainable, and accessible secondary O&G care to whānau in the

Eastern Bay of Plenty This situation has resulted in the need to urgently plan for service change to a primary birthing service until reinstatement of the required complement of O&G SMO staff is achieved.,

Temporarily changing the Whakatāne O&G service to a primary birthing unit is not the preferred option for the community and all other options have been considered. It is recognised that making this change will also place significant additional pressure on Tauranga Maternity services and this will likely also require ongoing locum support.

Recruitment

Health New Zealand remains fully committed to restoring secondary services at Whakatāne Hospital.

Health New Zealand, Bay of Plenty has commenced a focused recruitment campaign for O&G SMOs. We are actively investigating sourcing of SMOs from both the United Kingdom and Australia. We will continue to employ available locums to support Tauranga and Whakatāne clinical Services.

We are also looking at the potential to implement a Rural Generalist mixed model, as a sustainable rural workforce and service model moving forward.

Medium term plan

We will work with our clinical and operational teams to ensure safe transfer / transport arrangements, which will ensure safe, rapid transportation of people in labour from Whakatāne to Tauranga if required.

Our key priority is to ensure we have plans and risk mitigation in place to ensure the safety of people using maternity services at Whakatāne.

A detailed plan will be completed with input from maternity and obstetrics services at both Whakatāne and Tauranga hospitals and other impacted services such as anaesthesia, surgery, ED and Hato Hone St John's Ambulance Services. The planning will consult with and be supported by regional and national O&G Clinical Networks.

Next steps

We would like to invite you to a hui to further discuss this change. We would like to arrange this in the coming days via Teams.

Please email Shae Skellern Shae.Skellern@bopdhb.govt.nz or the Group Director of Operations (GDO) Pauline.McGrath@bopdhb.govt.nz to confirm a suitable time that you can attend and we will send you a meeting invitation. We recognise that this request to meet is at short notice but we hope you can find the time to attend if not we can arrange to meet after the Christmas / New Year Break.