

The Honourable Dr Ayesha Verrall  
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Dear Hon Dr Ayesha Verrall

Multiple Sclerosis New Zealand is extremely disappointed to read the comments in the Otago Daily Times on 15 February 2023, that the application by the Otago Medical School to increase training places by 18 had been declined by the Government.

One day earlier Te Whatu Ora's newsletter highlighted the work being undertaken to address the workforce crisis: *"Te Whatu Ora is working to grow our frontline health workforce across a range of groups, including nurses, midwives, kaiāwhina, medical specialists and allied professionals."*

A well-resourced and supported clinical workforce is a key determinant to the health of New Zealanders. For conditions like Multiple Sclerosis, time matters. Early diagnosis, and intervention with treatment and lifestyle modifications can reduce disease and disability progression, dramatically improving long term brain health outcomes.

Te Whatu Ora's current strategy to source resources from overseas fills a void but continues to avoid the long-term issues. The shortage of doctors and nurses is not only a New Zealand issue. Continued inaction and underinvestment will continue to drive many health professionals offshore.

The lack of a long-term strategy and investment in supporting domestic student doctors is very short sighted. Ensuring adequate spaces for medical students, guaranteeing long term job security, establishing pathways for specialist training and investing in health research should be the key priority for Health NZ and the Government.

The New Zealanders' for Health Research commissioned poll by Kantar in 2022, reported the top ranked priority of respondents is improving hospitals and health system. Fundamentally this is not achievable without long term, meaningful investment in the workforce.

Ranta et al, in the 2015 paper in the NZ Medical Journal article '[New Zealand's neurologist workforce: a pragmatic analysis of demand, supply and future projections](#)' reported that 8 years ago NZ's supply of Neurologists was equivalent to 36 full-time equivalents (FTE). At that time this was insufficient to meet current the assessed need demand of 74 FTE. They warned that:

*"Pressures on healthcare dollars are ever increasing and we cannot expect to address the identified service gap by immediately doubling the number of neurologists. Instead we propose a 12-year strategic approach with investments to enhance service productivity, strengthen collaborative efforts*

*between specialists and general service providers, moderately increase the number of neurologists and neurology training positions, and develop highly skilled non-specialists including trained neurology nurses, physician assistants, and/or general practitioners with a special interest in neurology.'*

There has been no significant increase of investment in the Neurological workforce. Instead, New Zealand has one third the number of neurologists per head of population when compared with Australia. We have dedicated physicians remaining well beyond normal retirement years to fill the gaps, and significant wait times at both public and private clinics.

As more clinicians reach retirement age, alongside an ageing population, this problem will continue to plague our health system to the detriment of all New Zealanders with health issues.

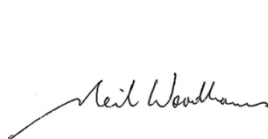
As reported in the [2018 Global Burden of Disease Report](#), neurological disorders are the leading cause of disability and second highest cause of death, representing a huge global health problem. One-in-three people now suffer from a neurological disorder worldwide. In the past 15 years, the proportion of people affected has increased from 20 percent to more than 30 per cent. It predicts neurological disease will be the biggest cause of death in New Zealand by 2040.

Consistently we hear of successive Governments passing the buck and placing blame on lack of investment in the past. If the current Government does not act now, you will leave the same legacy. We urge you to address these issues immediately and assure New Zealanders that their long-term health is at the heart of the Government's focus.

We appreciate your limited time in the role as Health Minister but implore you to reconsider an ill-advised decision to maintain the status quo on medical training intake numbers.

We offer our support and services to work with the Government and Te Whatu Ora in addressing the issues facing over 4130 people with MS, their whanau, carers, and 1 in 5 New Zealanders living with a Neurological condition.

Yours Sincerely,



Neil Woodhams  
MSNZ President



Amanda Rose  
MSNZ National Manager