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Southern DHB chooses 16 practices eager to become health care homes

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Queenstown Medical Centre GP Richard Macharg is “excited and proud” to be part of the health care home programme

Overwhelmed with applications for the initiative, Southern DHB has staggered implementation, partly due to budget constraints

The health care homes initiative is under way in the south with four practices selected for initial implementation and a further 12 joining within the next 12 months.

As part of its new Primary and Community Care Strategy and Action Plan, the Southern DHB announced last week it has selected Gore Health Centre, Gore Medical Centre, Queenstown Medical Centre, and Dunedin's Amity Health Centre as its first providers.

Dunedin practices Meridian Medical Centre, Te Kāika, and Broadway Medical Centre join "later this year", the DHB says, along with Waihopai Health Services, in Invercargill, and Cromwell's Junction Health, Wanaka Medical Centre and Aspiring Medical Centre.

A third group joins in mid-2019: Mornington Health Centre, in Dunedin, Alexandra medical practices (Centennial, Cornerstone and Central), North End Health Centre, in Oamaru, Clutha Health First, and Invercargill Medical Centre.

Flood of applications

Overwhelmed with applications for the initiative, Southern DHB has staggered implementation, partly due to budget constraints. It received 27 applications from practices wanting to become a health care home.

The DHB will pay practices an immediate \$8 per patient per year, and a further \$8 per patient if health care home conditions are met.

In a media release, Southern DHB says the 16 practices provide health services to about 120,000 people, almost 40 per cent of the region's enrolled population.

WellSouth PHO chief executive Ian Macara acknowledges frustration with the staggered rollout but urges patience. He says one practice was "quite angry" to miss out on the first tranche, but it would be in the programme by July 2019 at the latest.

Planning for the future

Richard Macharg, of Queenstown Medical Centre, says he's "excited and proud" to be in the first tranche. In an email to staff this week, provided to *New Zealand Doctor*, he says it will lead to further improvement and positive change.

"This is going to provide a fantastic opportunity for Queenstown Medical Centre to continue to improve our high-quality service even further with a strong focus on our registered population," he says in the email.

Gore Health Centre business manager Rhonda Reid is pleased two Gore practices have been selected and says it will ease the eventual development of a hub.

Mrs Reid says Gore Health, which is co-located with Gore Hospital, has 4500 patients and hasn't really developed systems to keep up with its growing patient numbers.

It's been considering a raft of improvements to make its service more patient-friendly, and the health care home designation is the ideal mechanism, she says.

For instance, it operates a patient portal now, but it isn't well used, and the model will help foster improved use of technology.

The extra patient funding could allow the practice to hire extra staff, such as a care coordinator, who could perhaps be shared with Gore Medical Centre, she says.