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Waitematā DHB and Department of Corrections develop new prison-based programme for junior doctors

Waitematā DHB and the Department of Corrections, have developed a new training role for junior doctors to experience healthcare within a prison.

The initiative, believed to be the first of its kind in New Zealand, took shape at Auckland Prison this month when a junior doctor started work as a house officer.

Doctors complete a six-year under-graduate degree before becoming newly qualified house officers. During the first few years of their careers, they work on 13-week rotations in many different areas of health care. House officers taking part in the new prison training role will be in their second year following graduation. New placements at the prison also will occur every 13 weeks.

“It’s the first time a post-graduate trainee doctor has been based within Corrections” says Laura Chapman, Senior Medical Officer at Waitematā DHB. “The prison environment is traditionally a difficult space to recruit healthcare professionals to. We are delighted to assist Corrections to help lift the healthcare delivery, while providing significant training opportunities for junior doctors and providing a positive contribution to society.”

“Waitematā DHB serves Auckland Prison but until now only very experienced doctors have provided care for inmates. Nurses have also had training experience at Auckland Prison for some time. The house officer role is a natural progression.”

“Auckland Prison is New Zealand’s only maximum-security facility, housing some of the most difficult prisoners. It can be a very challenging place. It’s good for our doctors to have this exposure. This is a GP service on steroids. They will be delivering day-to-day medical advice, chronic care and emergency care”.

Dr Dale Bramley, CEO at Waitematā DHB, says the groundbreaking new initiative will also contribute to equitable health outcomes in our community.

“One emphasis here will be delivery of a service that is culturally appropriate within a very specific environment.”

Department of Corrections’ Northern Regional Operations Director for Health, Debbie Hogan says the house officers will gain experience in multiple areas, including mental illness, acute and chronic disease management.

“The experience may assist house officers in making informed decisions about a future career in primary or community health with a focus on underserved populations,” she says. “In delivering care within a Corrections facility, particularly for people with issues of high complexity, the house officer will be immersed in social, cultural and health diversity and gain a greater understanding of differing world views on wellbeing in social contexts.

“We hope that with the success of this first placement we will be able to extend this across other prisons within the Northern Region and continue to enhance health care delivery for the people in our care”.

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For further information, contact:

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