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New Chief Medical Officer inspired by GP's example

Newly appointed Waitematā DHB Chief Medical Officer Dr Jonathan Christiansen hasn't forgotten the hard-working family GP whose example helped put him on the path to medical school.

"It is one of my most abiding memories as a child," the father-of-two says. "House visits were the norm back then and there was something incredibly reassuring about the fact that Dr Lloyd Richwhite would appear if something was wrong.

"He was an old-fashioned, available-to-the-community-24/7-GP who did everything... delivering babies and visiting the elderly – an absolutely extraordinary guy."

Dr Richwhite, who died last year aged 101, unknowingly inspired the Ellerslie schoolboy who, by the age of 14, was 100% focussed on science and, ultimately, a career in medicine.

"My pathway to medicine was, in hindsight, interesting," Dr Christiansen says. "I am the only medically trained person in an extended family of people who are either teachers, accountants or in some way connected to the corporate sector."

Dr Christiansen completed medical school in 1993 and first worked as a Registered Medical Officer (RMO) in Tauranga.

Previous aspirations to be a surgeon were put aside as his interest in the medical specialties grew.

"I'd done quite a lot of surgery during my extended medical elective in an under-served rural hospital in a remote area of Western Kenya. I really enjoyed it but was quickly reminded that Western medicine is very different when I returned home.

"I became more interested in the complex cognitive side of being a physician - when you're trying to integrate a range of problems and seemingly unrelated symptoms to come to a conclusion for the management of a patient's condition."

Dr Christiansen was appointed as an Emergency Department House Officer in 1994 at North Shore Hospital where he'd first set foot three years prior as a fifth year medical student.

He was still at the hospital and working as a medical registrar in 1996 when he left for the US and seven years of specialist training.

"I came back in 2003 as a general physician, running a general medical team and working as a Consultant Cardiologist."

"And I've been here ever since in varying roles, including Head of Division for Medicine and Health of Older People Services and Associate CMO."

Dr Christiansen is also a Clinical Senior Lecturer in Medicine at the University of Auckland and the immediate past NZ President of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians. He chaired the bi-national Education Committee for the College for four years and maintains a high interest in medical education.

The avid tramper juggles his professional life with family time – generally spent around the bush, mountains and lakes of Nelson and the Tasman district.

He is also "absolutely fanatical" about classical music (an interest he shares with his professional musician wife) and is a long-term member of the New Zealand Doctors' Orchestra.

He looks forward to immersing himself in his new role as a key member of the DHB's Executive Leadership Team.

"My job is about ensuring we provide the best possible clinical service," he says. "I am focussed on the quality of the service, how we might improve it, our patients' view of what we do and maintaining the right level of expertise among our clinicians. Wrapped around that, of course, is the equity of care."

Dr Christiansen replaces Dr Andrew Brant who, after nine years as CMO, remains with the DHB as its Deputy Chief Executive and the lead on a number of planned new major facilities, including a new surgical hospital.

"Jonathan is well-known and respected in our organisation and his considerable experience and roles held both here and externally demonstrate the skills and leadership qualities required to succeed in the position of CMO," Waitematā DHB CEO Dr Dale Bramley says.

Caption: New Waitematā DHB Chief Medical Officer, Dr Jonathan Christiansen

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For further information, contact:

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About Waitematā DHB

Waitematā DHB serves the largest population of any district health board in New Zealand, currently standing at more than 630,000 people. We have a workforce of more than 7,500 staff spread across more than 80 sites, including North Shore Hospital and Waitakere Hospital. We are also the Northern Region provider of forensic psychiatry and child disability services, plus the metro Auckland provider of child community dental services and community alcohol and drug services.