3 August 2020

Ms Michelle Arrowsmith
Deputy Director-General
DHB Performance, Support and Infrastructure
Ministry of Health
Molesworth Street
WELLINGTON

By email to: michelle.arrowsmith@health.govt.nz

Tēnā Koe Ms Arrowsmith

Re: Designing better mental health units will enable recovery

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the Ministry of Health’s ‘The National Asset Management Programme Report’ (The Report) released on 11 June 2020. We are writing to see how we may assist the Ministry’s Health Infrastructure Unit in addressing the identified concerns.

The RANZCP in New Zealand is represented by Tu Te Akaaka Roa/ New Zealand National Committee. The Committee has reviewed this very comprehensive Report detailing the state of health facilities across the DHBs. We were cognisant that many mental health units require modernising, however, this Report quantifies the scale of problem within mental health units. Of the 24 DHB units included in the report only 3 were rated as meeting good design principles.

The RANZCP accepts that the Report is only a snapshot of some DHB’s mental health units, however, 70 percent of units do not provide adequate privacy, safety designs or therapeutic space to support diverse consumer needs. We are concerned that some people in this environment may not seek help due to privacy and cultural considerations. The physical structures and layout of mental health units should be designed to maintain cultural integrity and acceptance.

Psychiatrists work alongside the 5% of consumers living with complex mental health, addiction and chronic physical illnesses - requiring high level interventions often only available at the units studied in the Report. Therefore, we are looking to the DHBs to develop facilities that provide a safe, therapeutic and compassionate place for consumers to be treated and to start their journey to recovery.

It is very difficult to implement recovery focused approaches when the working environment does not support this kaupapa. We highlight in our position statement 61 that mental health units are often not configured in a way that supports best practice models of care. The RANZCP is committed to training psychiatrists to provide person–centred care and to achieving the best possible outcomes and consumer experience of care, through designing care that enables consumer dignity whilst ensuring their safety.

We commend the Ministry of Health in providing robust analysis indicating that well-designed environments can enable recovery.
In summary, this Report acknowledges poor building designs are impacting on our ability to deliver appropriate care. When the physical environment is not well-designed this has implications for the workforce and safety e.g. the design may require greater levels of oversight by the staff if disruptive consumers are able to interact with other consumers.

The New Zealand Committee for Addiction Psychiatry notes that mental health units must also accommodate consumers with addictions, such as inpatient detoxification units. Therefore, the needs of consumers living with addictions, require particular attention as the physical surroundings can have a significant impact on a person’s experience of treatment and their longer term engagement in treatment.

This Report detailed a number of safety and privacy concerns that require wider discussions and actions. We understand that redesigning mental health units resides primarily with the DHBs. Psychiatrists work every day with very unwell people. Therefore, we are keen to provide advice on how redesigning these spaces to assist those who work within them and ensure consumer care is not compromised. We support co-designing such units with consumers and their whānau is of paramount importance in order to future-proof mental health units, making them places where people can have an enriching experience of care and embrace recovery. Te Kaunihera, the RANZCP’s Māori Health Committee, comprises Māori psychiatrists and carers who are able to provide specific input from a Te Ao Māori perspective.

We thank you for preparing this valuable Report which has identified significant challenges in delivering best practice care to those requiring support. We are concerned by the findings and would like to meet with you to discuss how we can provide assistance and leadership in improving mental health units. We will be in contact with you. Meanwhile, if you have any further questions regarding this letter, please contact the New Zealand National Office – Tu Te Akaaka Roa. Ms Rose Matthews, National Manager, supports our mahi and may be contacted by email rosemary.matthews@ranzcp.org or by telephone on 04 472 7265.

Ngā mihi nui

Dr Mark Lawrence   FRANZCP
Chair, Tu Te Akaaka Roa - New Zealand National Committee

Dr Susanna Galea- Singer
Treasurer, Tu Te Akaaka Roa - New Zealand National Committee
Chair, The New Zealand Committee for Addiction Psychiatry

Dr Claire Paterson FRANZCP
Chair, Te Kaunihera
References


