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11 June 2020**MEDIA RELEASE****Medical specialists back the COVID-19 response and put their weight behind the recovery in the health sector**The Council of Medical Colleges (CMC) has put its support behind the COVID-19 response in New Zealand and committed to working with government on the recovery phase in the health sector.CMC, which is the collective voice of the fifteen New Zealand and Australasian-based medical colleges, formally thanks the Prime Minister and public health sector led by Dr Ashley Bloomfield and the Ministry of Health for their tireless work and sound decision-making in managing New Zealand’s response to COVID-19. “With currently no active COVID-19 cases in the country, it is clear the right public health measures were taken to prevent what would have been catastrophic for the health sector and the New Zealand public,” says the CMC Chair, Dr John Bonning.CMC says it is a testament to the New Zealand Government, and public health physicians across the country that New Zealand is in the position it is in now. “Public health physicians have been integral in this response - providing modelling and advice to government, communicating with the public, advising hospitals, and contact tracing to slow the spread of disease. This was all done in a rapidly changing environment where decisions had to be made quickly and with limited information,” says Dr Bonning.   As the pandemic unfolded across the world in early March, the New Zealand health sector was gearing up for a possible flood of COVID-19 patients that threatened to swamp our healthcare service. General Practitioners (GPs), psychiatrists, and other specialists rapidly embraced new models of virtual care through telehealth and video consultations and clinic appointments to prevent the virus spreading to patients in waiting rooms and clinics. Intensivists prepared to maximise the available ICU capacity and worked with anaesthetists to prepare infection control procedures and repurpose operating theatres and anaesthetic machines. Emergency and general physicians prepared and staffed our hospitals’ acute front line, as did urgent care in the community, and our pathology colleagues rapidly upscaled laboratory testing on an unprecedented scale. “There is not one area of the health sector that hasn’t risen to this challenge,” says Dr Bonning. “It is not an overstatement to say the entire health workforce watched in horror as internationally stories emerged about the high death rate, the overwhelmed national health services and the harrowing decisions their international colleagues were being forced to make about prioritising critical healthcare. We saw health workers under siege all over the world and we watched as colleagues were listed as testing positive and dying.” CMC recognises that the health impact of COVID-19 is most certainly not over yet. The response including monitoring for COVID-19 will be ongoing. We are in no doubt that decisions made up to now will be scrutinized with the benefit of hindsight as the pandemic progresses and the health, social and economic impact continues. Medical specialists anticipate patients will have increased health needs due to delayed treatment, as well as emerging physical and mental health needs as a direct result of the economic and social consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.  This pandemic has tested the health sector on all sides and will continue to do so. We can use this crisis to redesign aspects of healthcare delivery, Choosing Wisely to rationally and equitably allocate our precious healthcare resource. Dr Bonning says the CMC is committed to working with government and the Ministry of Health to ensure our health sector can meet these challenges and support all New Zealanders, in particular Māori and Pasifika communities, who typically experience inequitable health outcomes that will be exacerbated by the fall-out from the pandemic. CMC strongly recommends that the Government and Ministry partner with [Te Ohu Rata ō Aotearoa](https://teora.maori.nz/about/) (Te ORA) and [Te Rōpū Whakakaupapa Urutā](https://www.uruta.maori.nz/) for guidance as this pandemic progresses, to support equitable health outcomes for Māori.This statement has been considered by all CMC members and has the support of the majority of colleges. **The** [Council of Medical Colleges](https://www.cmc.org.nz/) **(CMC) is the recognised, trusted and authoritative collective voice for the Medical Colleges in New Zealand. It represents fifteen Medical Colleges who provide support to more than 7000 medical practitioners working in 36 vocational scopes/specialties in the New Zealand health system. CMC supports the provision of a well-trained and safe medical workforce to serve the best interests of the New Zealand community.****For more information or to organise an interview with Dr Bonning please contact: Virginia Mills on 021 124 9402**  |