



**Media Release - 21 October 2008**  
**Electronic Referrals Improves Continuity of Care**

Sharing health information is necessary to enable the ongoing provision of health services to patients. General practitioners (GPs) need to refer their patients to specialists, hospitals need to make sure GPs know about the treatment and care that has been provided while in hospital, and patients being referred from one hospital to another need to have their relevant information forwarded. Such a flow of information enables the continuity of care for patients.

The Hutt Valley District Health Board has implemented electronic referrals from general practice to the DHB based on standards published by an Expert Advisory Committee in 2007. The Health Information Strategy Advisory Committee (HISAC) is working with a further eight DHBs who have active projects underway to implement electronic referrals.

Graeme Osborne, Chair of HISAC, said “Electronic referrals are about getting the right information to the right person at the right time, and ensuring that no patient is lost in the system. The three reports issued by the Health and Disability Commissioner today highlight the importance of, and need, for timely and accurate exchange of information between providers.”

“The suite of standards we developed last year provides guidance for electronic information exchange when all or part of the patient care is transferred from one health provider to another”, said Mr Osborne.

Last week Health Minister, the Hon. David Cunliffe announced a ‘reconstituted and powered up’ role for HISAC. A core role for HISAC is to support collaboration and partnerships between organisations within the health and disability system.

Mr Osborne said, "If we are genuinely to put the patient at the centre of health care, then it is vital that we have secure, timely and reliable exchange of information between multiple health providers involved in specific instances of care."

At the same time as announcing the new focus for HISAC, the Minister also announced new appointments to the committee. Those appointments signal a greater emphasis on clinical leadership and consumer participation, bringing together broad experience in both public and private organisations in the health system and the ICT industry. The changes also provide joint membership between HISAC and the Quality Improvement Committee (QIC), which recognises the value of previous joint work around information quality, referrals and electronic prescribing.

The close relationship between HISAC and QIC highlights the improvements in quality of care and patient outcomes that can be achieved through improved information management in the health system.

As the Health and Disability Commissioner said this morning, "Improvements in electronic information exchange require leadership at the national level". HISAC will continue to work closely with QIC - and all stakeholders in the sector - to lift the priority of investments by DHBs and other health organisations in electronic information exchange to support referrals, prescribing and laboratory test ordering", said Mr Osborne.

For more information please contact:

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## **Role and function of HISAC**

HISAC is a Ministerial Advisory Committee established to provide independent, strategic advice to the Minister of Health and the health sector. HISAC assists the Minister of Health to achieve effective governance and delivery of the Health Information Strategy for New Zealand (HIS-NZ) by supporting the collaboration and partnering of organisations and individuals within the health and disability system.

HIS-NZ is a plan informed and led by the health and disability sector that aims to enhance the safe sharing of health information to meet emerging challenges, deliver improved health outcomes for patients and remedy identified gaps in health information systems in New Zealand.

A crucial aspect of HISAC's role is to ensure the views and interests of the health and disability sector are considered in the implementation of HIS-NZ. HISAC will also ensure transparency and coordination of the implementation of HIS-NZ and identify opportunities for innovation.

## **Committee membership**

HISAC consists of ten representatives and experts from across the health and disability sector and information and communications technology industry.

Chair:

Mr Graeme Osborne – Wellington – General Manager, Information Management, ACC

Members:

Dr Harry Pert – Rotorua – General Practitioner

Mr Chai Chuah – Lower Hutt – Chief Executive Officer, Hutt Valley DHB

Dr Chris Hendry – Christchurch – Executive Director, Midwifery & Maternity Providers Organisation

Ms Joanne Fitzpatrick – Auckland – Director, Women's Health Action Trust and Chair, NGO Forum

Mr David Moore – Wellington – Chief Executive, LECG Asia Pacific and Board Member, PHARMAC

Dr Pim Allen – Invercargill – Chief Medical Officer, Southland DHB

Mrs Elizabeth Plant – New Plymouth – Chief Pharmacist, Taranaki DHB

Dr Murray Milner – Wellington – Independent ICT Expert

Mr Nathan Torkington – Auckland – Independent ICT Expert