

## **Road to Nowhere**

**By Struan Clark**

On Monday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, a powhiri was held on Onetahua marae, in Pohara, Golden Bay, to welcome Rhoda McDonald, newly appointed Service Director for the Golden Bay Integrated Family Health Centre. This was a moving ceremony, with invitees representing Nelson Bays Primary Health, Nelson Marlborough DHB, Tasman District Council, and Golden Bay Community Board, as well as doctors from Golden Bay Medical Centre; nurses, a physio, activities coordinator and Clinical Nurse Manager from Golden Bay Community Hospital, community worker and social workers, welcomed by the tangata whenua of Mohua, themselves a rich cross section of respected members of the Golden Bay Community.

Later, kaumatua John Ward-Holmes told how pleased he had been that the Golden Bay Maori community had been asked for their help with the design and layout of the new health facility, something that would not have been considered in Golden Bay 20 years ago. Repeatedly during the powhiri, we heard of the commitment to and passion for Golden Bay; how excellent healthcare provision for all is a pillar of a thriving rural community; and how the people of Golden Bay deserve this.

I am sharing this with you to illustrate how a project, which started about fragmented services, inefficiencies, outdated buildings, a recruitment crisis and an insolvent rest home, has become a focus of community pride, renewal and inclusiveness.

Similarly, this project has brought together PHO, DHB and community in an alliance to ensure the viability and sustainability of healthcare in the bay, including residential care for the elderly. Services will be provided by Nelson Bays PHO, a not-for-profit government agency committed to excellent primary care and reduction of health inequality.

There is a different atmosphere in healthcare here now, if you care to notice it. There is teamwork, mutual respect and a sense of working towards a common goal. We have a visiting dietician, diabetes nurse specialist, respiratory nurse specialist, and our nurses are pulling in all the blokes for their cardiovascular health checks. We have more doctors and a steady stream of young student and trainee doctors and nurses.

So the announcement by the four trustees of the newly formed Golden Bay Rototai Health Centre Charitable Trust, fronted by retired Golden Bay doctor Vic Eastman of their wish to build a medical centre – just a medical centre - on Rototai Road, outside Takaka, is sickening. An offer of land from a mystery donor, plans yet to be revealed (or rehashed, perhaps), will save millions, they trumpet.

Why, we have to ask?

Because the proposed site at Central Takaka, 2.5km from the Takaka TDC offices, is too far out of town for some. So they propose, instead, a site 1.6km from this spot, in the opposite direction. The needs of the small number of people who want to walk to the doctor will be no better met. As most patients arrive by car anyway, what consideration have they given to the increased traffic past the High School pick up and drop off point, and the roading changes required at the junction of Rototai Road, Meihana and Commercial Streets?

Golden Bay Community Health Te Hauora O Mohua trustees know that many would have preferred our IFHC to be built in downtown Takaka. We know the disadvantages of access to school students and community mental health clients, the elderly who live at the north end of Takaka, and are considering ways to mitigate this. We would have liked a spanking new building in town, too. But we also know that this facility is for all of Golden Bay, not just Takaka, and for the overwhelming majority, it will make no difference which end of Takaka it is closer to. We know that for many, discarding a perfectly good, 20 year old hospital building would have been unforgivable waste. We know that the established garden of the Central Takaka site will be a lovely place for elderly residents to walk and sit. We know how much more it would have cost.

They want an 'affordable, no-nonsense' alternative.

Discarded as nonsense, then, is appropriate and efficient use of scarce health professionals in our isolated rural area, team work to deliver better care, shared learning and pooled resources to manage the tidal wave of age related conditions which is already upon us.

Nonsense our desire to reduce fragmentation of care, which leads to inefficiency and potentially dangerous gaps in communication.

Nonsense our concern that for 90% of the time we have a hospital with no doctors, which sometimes provides emergency care but mostly doesn't; where any medical review of a patient requires a doctor to leave the medical centre and drive 3km to the hospital.

Nonsense to support our hospital nurses to help in the provision of after hours care, easing the after hours burden on the doctors, the most significant factor in the crisis in retention and recruitment of rural doctors.

Nonsense to commit to maintaining a primary care service in Collingwood.

Nonsense to aspire to an excellent, safe, attractive facility, providing whole of life care, close to home, for the people of Golden Bay.

And finally, of course, nonsense to want to retain residential care for the elderly in Golden Bay. That Joan Whiting Rest Home is still open is through the efforts of members of the Golden Bay Community Health group, as it's lifeline funding was dependent upon its active participation in the development of the integrated health centre to replace it. In the future elderly people will remain at home longer, and will come into residential care requiring a higher level of nursing and medical care than in the past. Our facility will provide for this admirably, whilst also creating spacious, comfortable and dignified living spaces, in a lovely mature garden. A 'crowded annex inside a small hospital' – that is the real nonsense.

Golden Bay Community Health will be a shot in the arm for healthcare in Mohua. These men may think this naïve optimism, but I'll have that over tired cynicism any day.

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