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BAY OF PLENTY
DISTRICT HEALTH BOARD
HAUORA A TOI

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Mortuary not used by the majority of Tauranga deceased

The majority of people who die in Tauranga - whether in the hospital or the community - will continue to have their care provided by local funeral directors, as has been the case here and in Whakatane for many years.

“The proposed closure of Tauranga Hospital’s ageing mortuary will make no difference to most in the community,” says chief operating officer Phillip Balmer.

While the DHB has agreed to delay the mortuary closure for three months, this is to allow time for its main users – the Ministry of Justice and the Police to work with the DHB and Iwi to identify an alternate way to retain post-mortem services in the region.

“Only the deceased whose bodies need a post-mortem examination or for whom no death certificate has been signed require a mortuary environment,” says Phillip. “For 95 per cent of families, their loved ones will be cared for by their chosen funeral director, as they always have been.”

The idea that all the deceased in the region would be sent to Hamilton or Rotorua in the event of a mortuary closure was incorrect said Mr Balmer. “It is only those deceased in whom the Police or the Coroner has an interest who could be affected. This is a small percentage of the people who die in the Bay of Plenty.”

The mortuary has principally become a facility for post-mortem examinations, and for use by Police for body storage, pending release by the Coroner. For people who die in the community or in hospital and a death certificate is issued, a funeral director is called

to collect their bodies and care is provided for the deceased in their purpose-built premises.

“This has been the case for many years, and will continue, regardless of the mortuary availability.”

A meeting last week between the Ministry of Justice, Police, the DHB and local Iwi left key mortuary stakeholders positive that a solution can be found to keep post-mortem and associated services in Tauranga. “Consultation with the community will occur, as the Ministry of Justice, Police and the DHB progress these plans. As part of this process the DHB will provide mortuary support in the meantime,” he says.

Mr Balmer rejected claims by Paora Stanley (in last week’s *Bay News*) that the DHB was closing the mortuary to avoid the costs of transporting bodies. “The DHB is not responsible for Police or Coronial decisions and these costs including body transportation have never been the DHB’s responsibility. The decision to propose closing the mortuary and not renewing the DHB’s contract with the Ministry of Justice for post mortem facility provision was based on the need for a significant capital investment to be made to make the mortuary compliant with the Ministry of Justice’s accreditation requirements. It is the DHB’s view that it should prioritise any spending on health for the region’s citizens, not upgrading a building to provide a service not predominantly used by the DHB.”

ENDS

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