

9 August 2011

The Hon Tony Ryall  
Minister of Health  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington

Dear Minister

**Report of Health Select Committee on inquiry into improving New Zealand's environment to support innovation through clinical trials**

The New Zealand Medical Association (NZMA) were pleased to see the Health Select Committee's report on the inquiry into improving New Zealand's environment to support innovation through clinical trials and write to give our support to this report.

In particular we:

- agree with the committee that improving support for clinical trials will better support innovation and improvements for health services
- support streamlining of the review processes, but stress that this should not be at the expense of careful consideration of the risks and benefits
- applaud the drive for more clinical research through cohesion across the whole of government, by changing the emphasis and culture of district health boards, by facilitating relationships with sponsor companies, and by increasing research infrastructure support
- see distinct benefits from the creation of a national research database that serves the needs of the diverse stakeholders (including researchers, host institutions, sponsors, monitoring agencies and interested members of the public). This would aid approval processes, maximise collaborative opportunities and minimise documentary duplication. We note that the Health IT Board are currently advocating for the sharing of systems wherever possible and we encourage the adoption of a similar philosophy regarding clinical research
- agree that the consideration of observational studies in an expedited fashion is appropriate, however we urge some caution about applying the expedited review process to interventional studies
- are pleased with the encouragement of district health boards to make clinical trials part of their core business. World wide experience shows that centres that conduct clinical

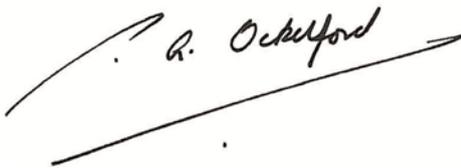
research alongside of even combined with standard care have higher efficacy and safety. They also have more satisfied workforce with updated skills and knowledge.

Having said that we do wish to sound one note of caution. The NZMA does have some concern over the proposal to establish a two tier ethics system that may emerge if sponsored clinical trials are split off. While, the enhancements that are otherwise proposed should achieve a much timelier consideration of applications, the establishment of this separate line may introduce more delay in considering all research due to uncertainties and multiple channels. There are benefits that now occur with the consideration of multi-national trials alongside investigator initiated ones. This “cross-fertilisation” helps inform committees and also assists researchers when they hear about a range of study designs.

The plan to address national consistency across District Health Boards (DHBs) is a positive but the sponsored clinical research generated by individual groups should not be seen as an easy source of funding for DHBs. The health system benefits in many intangible ways from the efforts of groups of clinicians to attract sponsored research dollars. These benefits include building the expertise to perform the trials and frequently savings for drug costs. The involvement of specialist groups in these activities is also a focus to retain and recruit young graduates back to specialties as well as developing international collaborations which not infrequently open the doors for training opportunities internationally. These benefits are built up over many years and can only be achieved by allowing those groups to retain surplus funds and the associated interest earnings. In this way the focus, initiative and enthusiasm of these clinical groups can not only be rewarded but provide the funding for research expansion within those specialties.

We hope that the Government will consider our comments when responding to the Health Select Committee’s report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dr. Ockelford". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a long, thin horizontal line that extends across the width of the signature.

Dr Paul Ockelford  
NZMA Chair