

Mackay HHS improves specialist outpatients access

A campaign to improve access to specialist doctors and surgery at Mackay Base Hospital has dramatically reduced the waiting list.

The number of people waiting longer than the recommended time for a Specialist Outpatient appointment has dropped from 5283 at June 30 2014 to 840 at the end of May.

Mackay Hospital and Health Service Board chair Colin Meng said extra clinics and operating theatre sessions and the recruitment of specialist doctors had achieved the result.

“This means we have taken 4443 long-wait patients off the list since June 2014,” Mr Meng said.

Mr Meng said the Board had allocated \$5 million to reduce the number of long-wait patients.

“We recognised this was an area where our service could improve and made a commitment to reduce the wait where possible,” he said.

Patients on the Specialist Outpatient waiting list have been referred by their GP to be reviewed by a specialist doctor. Some, but not all, of these patients require surgery to treat their condition.

A project team was formed to review waiting lists, organise extra clinics and staff and hopes to have the long wait list below 500 at the end of June.

“We would like for that number to be zero but these patients are in areas where it is difficult to get enough specialist doctors such as neurosurgery, hepatology and neurology. We will continue to do what we can to get services for these patients,” Mr Meng said.

“I congratulate the team that has worked solidly for almost 12 months to achieve this extraordinary result.”

The areas of biggest improvement are general surgery, colorectal scopes, urology, ENT, cardiology and ophthalmology.

Specialties where there are some delays for treatment are vascular surgery, neurosurgery, hepatology, neurology, orthopaedics and rheumatology.

With the exception of orthopaedics these are all specialties where Mackay Base Hospital relies on the services of a visiting specialist.

Mr Meng said managing demand for outpatient departments would continue to challenge the health service.

“In the bigger picture we are working to reform the way patients enter the hospital system from the GPs and ensuring they only come to a specialist doctor if that is what they need,” he said.

The HealthPathways program will go live on June 10 to give GPs a tool to find the best care for their patients.

HealthPathways is a web-based information portal that provides pathways for assessment, management and referral of patients and assists GPs to navigate the patient through the complex local health system.

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