



MEDIA RELEASE

5 May 2011

Only 77 of Christchurch's 92 pharmacies fully operational

Of the 92 community pharmacies in Christchurch, only 77 are operating at full capacity after the 22 February earthquake. Fifteen community pharmacies are affected in some way: four are closed, seven have relocated and four are co-locating with another pharmacy.

Like most small businesses in the city, a further 52 pharmacies are operating from their normal premises but are facing a range of difficulties. These issues include water, power and sewerage interruptions, reduced foot traffic and access difficulties, like road closures, parking restrictions, damaged roads and footpaths. Generator back-up has become a must for some pharmacies, as Orion has advised that they are expecting four or five outages during winter - each of which could last five hours.

One such pharmacy is Guild member, Life Pharmacy the Palms, in Shirley. The pharmacy is situated in The Palms Shopping Centre and reopened on Tuesday 19 April after the earthquake. While the pharmacy has held up structurally, they are serving customers from a caravan set up in the mall car park, with dispensary staff managing prescriptions in the original premise in the mall. Dispensary manager, Chris Leggett, says that although their script numbers have dropped about 25%, patients have been understanding and supportive of their situation.

"On the first day we opened, we had one elderly couple come to us for their medicines and they came back later to collect them after shopping at another mall," says Chris. "They could have easily got their scripts filled there, but they didn't.

"We are doing the best we can and staff have been very positive."

Over and above the 15 pharmacies affected, a number of others have been yellow stickered and are operating with limited services, says Karen Kennedy, Clinical Leader and Pharmacy Co-ordinator for the Canterbury Primary Earthquake Group. This means that some pharmacies are still operating with damaged premises and will have to move out when repairs are made.

"At least one pharmacy has a building alongside it that needs to be demolished," says Ms Kennedy. "As they share a wall, it is uncertain whether the pharmacy will close or be demolished," she says. "And there may well be other pharmacies in the same situation."

The impact of relocation, co-location and closure varies from pharmacy to pharmacy but Ms Kennedy says that they all come with their own set of unique issues. "Community pharmacists are also trying to manage stock levels with changed delivery times, and populations, coming into their pharmacies. This issue is compounded for pharmacies that are co-located." Each pharmacy is affected differently - some pharmacies are experiencing reasonable increases in their workload due to a population shift, while others have had to reduce staff hours or make staff redundant to cope with depopulation, leading to concerns about long term viability.

Ms Kennedy says that pharmacists and their staff are also working under significant personal stress. "They are coping with the damage or loss of their homes, their partners being made redundant, or losing their businesses," she says.

The impact of these changes to locations has meant that patients also have the added stress of finding a new pharmacy, combined with having to get to know a new pharmacist who is not familiar with their medical history and which medicines they are taking. "Many of the closed and relocated pharmacies are in the worst hit areas of the city where roads and footpaths are not accessible," says Ms Kennedy. "Patients in these areas already have difficulties accessing all services with an increased distance from their home and the expense involved in travel."

These impacts have been keenly felt by the elderly, many of whom already have mobility issues.

"Community pharmacists are also concerned that depopulation will be taken into consideration when business interruption insurance is calculated. This means pharmacists will not receive what they thought they would," says Ms Kennedy. As businesses are not able to insure against depopulation, this makes it very difficult for businesses to have adequate cover in these sorts of circumstances. "This just adds to the worry."

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Notes:

- The Pharmacy Guild of New Zealand (Inc) is a national membership organisation representing community pharmacy owners. We provide leadership on all issues affecting the sector and we advocate for the business interests of community pharmacy.
- For additional information on the Guild and community pharmacy, please go to www.pgnz.org.nz.