

Increased out of hours service at rural laboratories

A review of the out of hours roster at Thames and Tokoroa Laboratories has been conducted over the last year. The review began with Thames Hospital Laboratory, and as a result an evening shift from Monday to Friday, and a rostered weekend day shift was implemented in February 2014.

Prior to the change of roster, laboratory staff worked from Monday-Friday 0700-1700 and all testing requested outside these hours was covered by call backs. Staff often worked up to 12 days in a row and were unable to take 9 hour breaks on weekends. This workload was unsustainable and created health and safety risks. The Emergency department had requested expanded hours of service in order to effectively manage patients out of hours, to enable better patient flows and to meet the 6 hour ED target.

As a result of the new shift roster, the laboratory now provides a full service from 0700-2200 Monday-Friday, and 0800-1630 on weekends.

Staff now work much safer hours and the number of call backs has decreased significantly. Clinical services, particularly ED have realised immediate benefits. Savings in the clinical areas is difficult to quantitate and has not been fully analysed, however all clinical areas report increased efficiency with patient management as a result of extended laboratory hours of service.

The model implemented at Thames has given positive benefits of safer working conditions for staff, an improved service to clinical areas and cost savings of approximately \$120K per annum. The same model is now about to be implemented at Tokoroa Hospital laboratory, initially on a four month trial.