

National Framework for Genetics Required – New Zealand

Australasia's peak medical diagnostic body, the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia (RCPA), is calling for the development of a nationally coordinated approach for Genetics, to oversee the rapid expansion of this revolutionary field of medicine.

Representatives from the RCPA put forward this call to the Minister of Health, the Hon Tony Ryall, in a meeting late yesterday afternoon.

The CEO of the RCPA, Dr Debra Graves, says New Zealand, like Australia, is lagging behind places like the UK in planning to deal with this "genetic revolution".

"Genetics is providing us with cutting-edge diagnostic tools, with exciting new applications that have the potential to challenge how we look at healthcare," according to Dr Graves.

"It's estimated that 40 to 60 percent of New Zealanders will experience a disease with a genetic component.

"Applications are being developed across an incredibly wide range of conditions and diseases, including well known ones like breast cancer susceptibility and pre-natal testing, as well as less common ones, and the rapidly expanding field of pharmacogenetics, which provides more individual diagnoses and treatments for patients.

"But we must remember that these incredibly powerful tools are like other diagnostic tools – results are not black and white, and it's important that the right patient gets the right test at the right time.

"It is essential that this be done within a detailed regulatory and implementation framework that provides the same level of quality assurance currently residing around traditional areas of Pathology. A crucial part of this is an adequately trained workforce.

"Importantly, all New Zealanders must realise that genetic testing is occurring, regardless of the lack of a coordinated approach."

The RCPA has identified six areas to be considered in the management of genetics for the healthcare system: regulatory; technological; ethical; conceptual; funding and workforce.

Importantly, the genetic pathology workforce must also be developed, as New Zealand currently has only a few practicing genetic pathologists and trainees.

1 April 2009

Media Enquiries

Dr Debra Graves
RCPA
(02) 8356 5858

Andrea Plawutsky
S2i Communications
(0419) 970 984