

Christchurch GPs respond to quake growth spurt

◆ Liane Topham-Kindley

Integrated family health centres will be built in the Christchurch suburbs of Halswell and Rolleston as populations boom following the earthquakes.

The areas were already growing, but the natural disasters of recent years have accelerated the need for more primary healthcare services.

The owners of Halswell Health, the only general practice in Halswell, have decided to open another clinic in the new subdivision of Longhurst being established in the area.

GPs Rob Aitken, Sandra Hicks, Sarah Marr, Phil Jacobs and Paul O’Gorman own Halswell Health, and Drs Hicks, Marr and Jacobs are joining pharmacists Doug Stanton and Karen Fraser and dentist Viv Levy as shareholders in the company building the IFHC.

Dr Hicks says all the shareholders will retain their original businesses in Halswell and open new ones.

“It’s taken us a very long time and we had one false start



Artist's impression of Longhurst Health, the IFHC planned for Halswell, in Christchurch; a second one will open south of the city in Rolleston

when we thought we would sell the current medical centre and just build one new medical centre, but now we’re just finishing renovating [the original medical centre].

“[Halswell] was planned as a growth area. The earthquake has accelerated the need for it.”

South of the city, Phil Schroeder has decided to take the bold move of leaving Rolleston Medical Centre and opening a new practice.

Dr Schroeder is in partnership with colleagues Susie Marsh and Peter Ryan but, under the

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new arrangements, they will remain at Rolleston Medical Centre and Dr Schroeder will go out on his own.

“We are envisaging an amicable way of feeding off from

the existing practice to a new practice that will operate entirely separate from the exist-

ing one,” Dr Schroeder says.

It was expected another medical centre would be needed in the growing area, he says, but “the earthquake just sped it up and took us by surprise”.

“Something that we might have had time to wonder about has become a huge priority and, to be honest, we can’t get development happening soon enough.”

Rolleston had never had its own medical centre until Dr Schroeder opened his practice from the local Plunket rooms in December 1991. A four-doctor practice by 1994, it moved into purpose-built rooms, which two years later were extended

to accommodate six doctors.

In 2010, the practice underwent a large rebuild and has become the focus of a health precinct with a physiotherapy, pharmacy, dentist and optometrist located in neighbouring properties.

“Now we need to repeat that over the other side of Rolleston, but this time it will be under one roof,” Dr Schroeder says.

Back in 1991, he never envisaged the area would grow so much.

A local developer will invest in the new building, which will house the medical centre and a range of other health providers, likely to include St John, a pharmacy and radiology services.

The centre is expected to serve the Selwyn district as an after-hours facility.

“Right now I should be sitting back and smelling the roses,” Dr Schroeder says. “But, to be quite honest, if I do that, then patients will not be seen in Rolleston and they will have to go elsewhere and that’s just not acceptable.” ■

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