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Osteopathic Council Response COVID-19

These are difficult times for us all, and Council wishes to acknowledge the uncertainty that the osteopathic profession has faced during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As you will be aware, New Zealand is currently at Alert Level 3, moving to Alert Level 4 on Wednesday, with the situation evolving rapidly from the previous Alert Level 2.

Since the announcement yesterday afternoon, we have wanted to confirm that we are providing the correct information before issuing a statement to the profession, especially one as serious as this.

The New Zealand government has not included osteopathic healthcare under the category of 'essential services', and that all non-essential services are required to close. It is therefore our expectation that osteopathic practices will be closed for face-to-face appointments while New Zealand remains at Alert Level 4.

We realise the financial strain that this may create for the profession, and we recommend exploring the support offered by the New Zealand government at this time. The Wage Subsidy is available to contractors and the self-employed, and the application process is very straight-forward. Please see the explanation of the process and application forms at the following link:

<https://www.workandincome.govt.nz/products/a-z-benefits/covid-19-support.html>

Many banks are also offering support for those experiencing financial hardship due to the pandemic.

profession have already renewed their APCs and paid the associated fees, there may be osteopaths that are expecting to face financial hardship. As an entity fully funded by the profession, the fees accrued through APC renewal are necessary to the functioning of the Council, and the Council must function under the HPCA Act.

Council has also explored flexible or delayed payment options, both in the past and for the current situation. It is again important to note that the costs associated with these options - whether these are the costs of finance, infrastructure and IT development and/or administration - would need to be passed on to the profession through an increased APC fee. For a small profession, it is more economical and expedient for practitioners to seek financial support from entities that are set up to provide it (e.g. banks, financial institutions and government agencies) rather than Council seeking to act in this role.

We are also aware that some osteopaths may be considering delaying their APC renewal until the Alert Level is decreased and clinics can reopen, thereby facing a reduced APC fee. Although this is an option for practitioners, the Council advises careful consideration before it is taken. Practitioners would not be able to act in their capacity as health professionals (including giving health advice or consulting with a patient remotely, such as over the phone or via the internet) without a current APC. Despite this, this may be a way for those facing significant hardship to ease the burden.

Please note, however, that although APCs are due for renewal on the 31st of March, the online renewal process will be open until the 30th of April. It is important that any osteopaths wishing to delay the start of their next APC contact Council directly, as should any osteopaths applying to renew after online applications have closed.

If individual practitioners have considered all the options available to them and are still concerned about their ability to pay APC fees, Council is happy to discuss individual cases.

Given the uncertainty around the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how New Zealand's response may develop, the Council will continue to consider what impact developments may have on the profession and may offer further guidance as necessary. While we aim to send this guidance to all registrants, please continue to check the OCNZ website for further news, as this is often the fastest and easiest way for us to post information.

Please be aware that the staff supporting the OCNZ, including our contact staff, will be working remotely, and there may be delays in getting through. We

Ngā mihi nui

Clare Prendergast
Registrar

Kaunihera Whakanao Uaiwi

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