

Health update: New Zealand health response in Samoa winds down

Source: Government of New Zealand

Date: 23 Oct 2009

Tony Ryall

New Zealand's emergency medical response to help tsunami victims in Samoa is winding down.

Health Minister Tony Ryall says he is advised there have been no new tsunami related medical cases seen in Apia hospital in the past two weeks and care is now largely being handed over to Samoan health services and aid agencies.

A small kiwi presence of a GP, two wound care nurses and a small number of trauma counsellors will stay on in Samoa until next week.

"At the peak New Zealand had more than 30 health professionals in Samoa providing wound care, infection control, routine surgical follow-ups, with some counselling for trauma and grief" says Mr Ryall.

"I would like to thank New Zealand health services and individual kiwis for the prompt and generous way they have stepped up to help our neighbours in Samoa."

The Health Minister says 815 Kiwi health professionals had volunteered to go to Samoa to help tsunami victims.

New Zealand's health services will continue to support ongoing tsunami related aid by providing visiting specialists. In the next few weeks and months this will include respiratory physicians - to assist with the after effects of wet lung (from breathing in seawater); microbiologists to assist with sampling and testing services; and psychiatric professionals to assist with grief counselling services. Routine care will now be provided by local medical professionals with ongoing support from visiting NZ medical personnel under existing aid programmes.

This will be facilitated by the Government's aid agency NZAID and its Australian counterpart AusAid, as the recovery phase of the health response continues in Samoa. Through NZAID, the New Zealand Government is providing significant long term support to improve the provision of healthcare in Samoa. Additional needs arising from the tsunami will be integrated into this ongoing assistance from NZAID and other donors. Most medical equipment and supplies brought to Samoa during the emergency response have been donated by the Government and companies in New Zealand and will remain in Samoa to assist with medical care.