



Taking hospital to the roadside



Auckland City Hospital emergency doctors involved with the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service. From left: Shay McGuinness, Barry Watkin (Westpac Rescue Helicopter chief paramedic), Tim Parke, Cameron Rosie, Alana Harper, Mike Nicholls and Scott Orman

Helen Tatham

Auckland City Hospital emergency department doctors will accompany paramedics on

Westpac rescue helicopter missions, in a trial that is the first of its kind in New Zealand.

Having a double medical crew is recognised best prac-

tice, says the hospital's adult emergency department clinical director, Tim Parke.

"It is really about taking the hospital to the roadside," Dr



Parke says. "We will be able to administer anaesthetic to the patient at the scene and will be able to perform amputations and ultrasound if necessary."

Normally this cannot be done until arrival at the hospital, he says. "The trial allows a faster care pathway."

Nine doctors have volunteered to take part in the two-year helicopter emergency medical service pilot: Dr Parke, four emergency medicine consultants, an emergency registrar, a paediatric intensive care specialist, an intensive care specialist and a cardiovascular anaesthetist.

The Auckland Rescue Helicopter Trust will provide overalls, helmets and life vests to the doctors, who will be on call for helicopter emergencies during their non-clinical time.

The doctors will be rostered on call 8am to 7pm Monday to Friday, and at other times during the Rugby World Cup and peak summer season. The helicopter will meet them at the hospital's helipad.

Dr Parke says, when people are in great peril (for example, in water), the helicopter crew will go to the rescue without a doctor. Vehicle crashes are likely to be the most common incidents the doctors will attend.

ecutive Bob Parkinson says the helicopter goes on 700 missions a year throughout greater Auckland and the Coromandel, with this year looking to be the busiest yet.

"We see this as an exciting development and a significant enhancement to the services that we provide."

The doctors have been training with helicopter crew for the past two months and went on some of their first missions in the past few weeks.

The idea came from Robin Mitchell, a mutual friend of Dr Parke and rescue helicopter chief paramedic Barry Watkin.

Dr Mitchell was liaison doctor between the hospital emergency department and helicopter, giving feedback on patient outcomes.

Before Dr Mitchell died of pancreatic cancer in July last year, Dr Parke and Mr Watkin promised to set up the trial.

Canadian doctor Chris Denny, who had experience in Ontario with a similar programme known as the Orange System, will be a consultant in the emergency department and medical lead for the project.

Similar systems operate in the UK, Australia, France and Scotland.

htatham@nzdoctor.co.nz

D

Helicopter trust chief ex-