

Board Members
Capital & Coast District Health Board

4 August 2005

Dear Board Members

The Wellington Civic Trust has taken an interest in the development of the new regional hospital being built on the Newtown site. As the hospital staff newsletter states (March 2005) "the new building will in time become an iconic building for Newtown, for Wellington and for the region".

The Civic Trust is an organisation established to promote and safeguard developments in the city which enhance the quality of the city's living and working environment.

The Trust is concerned that there seems to have been no consideration given in the design of the hospital complex, to the provision of outdoor spaces where patients can rest and recreate in the fresh air.

On seeing the architect's model of the completed hospital, it is clear that the amount of free ground-floor space will be very limited but there are large expanses of flat roof space which could provide outdoor areas for patients through the creation of roof gardens.

A member of the Trust, who is also an employee of Capital & Coast Health, approached Liz McLean on this matter and she apparently approached the Consultant architect with the idea. According to our member, the response from the architect was not favourable. His/her reply noted that:-

1. Wellington weather is extreme and would tend to blow a garden away and in addition the garden would get minimal use because of the weather
2. Roof gardens are costly to maintain
3. Health & Safety issues were of concern and safety railing to meet the standard required would be extremely costly.

The Civic Trust would like to respond to the architect's reasoning and convey to the members of the District Health Board our reasons why we believe a garden in a hospital setting is vital for patients, family and staff and the community that the hospital serves.

A hospital is, by definition, a healing environment. There are many studies which demonstrate that if the healing occurs away from the natural environment, patient recovery can be significantly delayed. Fresh air and sunlight contributes to wellness, especially for long stay patients. Having doors that give access to open space (be that at ground floor or on a roof-top) for bed and wheelchair-bound patients would facilitate this.

The architect expressed concern about the effect of Wellington's weather which at times can be extreme. The Trust's response is that if good garden design is implemented focusing on potted plants rather than large expanses of flower beds, with fencing to direct wind flows and sensible robust planting, the possibility of it being blown away should be minimised. There are many apartment buildings and high-rise offices in the city with roof-top gardens which demonstrates that this concern can be adequately dealt with.

The second point regarding maintenance costs need not be of concern if quality all-weather equipment is used and contributions towards meeting the cost are sought from a range of sources (see below).

The third issue concerning Health and Safety obviously needs to be addressed. For a roof-top garden, safety railing would need to be installed but the area the Trust envisages being used for this purpose accounts for only a small percentage of the total roof area available.

While the District Health Board may not have budgeted for the provision of outdoor recreation areas in the hospital's initial design, there are potential funding methods available should it wish to advance this idea.

A garden could become a community project. After all, hospitals are an integral part of a community - most people's lives at some point are touched by a hospital. What better way to foster community involvement in 'our' hospital than to encourage people to donate pots, plants and labour? Community involvement could also be fostered through a design competition for local landscape architects and students. Sponsors could be asked to donate staff time and materials – much like the process employed by Wellington City Council in the development and building of the Eco-House in Newtown. Potential stakeholders include the School of Design and Architecture at Massey and Victoria Universities, Businesses of Social Responsibility, community groups and TV networks ('Ground Force' type programmes).

To say a garden is not possible, negates a community's 'can do' attitude. For the holistic caring of the sick we believe it is a necessity and therefore well worth further investigation by the Board.

We look forward to receiving the Board's response.

Yours sincerely

Di Buchan
Chair