

The Evolution of Selina Sutherland Hospital: colourful history to exciting future plans

In 1865 a feisty Scottish nurse, Selina Sutherland, came to New Zealand to live with her sister Margaret Grant on a farm in Gladstone, Wairarapa. She became the driving force behind the establishment of the original Masterton Hospital in 1879, raising the funds needed by persuading landowners and townspeople to subscribe. She was famous for her daring nursing exploits, including riding through storms and swollen rivers to nurse typhoid patients. It is fitting that the current private hospital is named after her, and many doctors and nurses at Selina Sutherland Hospital have contributed over the past 28 years to continue her mission to provide quality healthcare locally in the Wairarapa.

Geographically isolated, the Wairarapa has always struggled to attract and retain medical personnel. It took initiative to provide the people of the Wairarapa with access to private healthcare. Glenwood Private Maternity and Surgical Hospital opened in 1910, founded by doctors Norman Prior, James Cowie and Percy Cook. Later, Dick Skelley and Graham Cowie plied their surgical skills and were both active on the Wairarapa Hospital Board. Around 35 years ago, they passed the baton to now-retired Anaesthetist Rob Dimock, General Surgeon and former Wairarapa DHB Board Member Rob Irwin (also retired), and local medical legend Dr Owen Prior (son of Norman Prior, dec 2023).

Supported by Board members Heaton Haglund (Pharmacist, dec 2016) and Ken Wilton, (Sellar and Sellar Accountant and Justice of the Peace, dec 2019) - they did a wide range of surgery, including Ear Nose and Throat, gynaecological procedures and even larger operations like bowel surgery. Their skills ensured that many patients and their families did not have the inconvenience and expense of travelling out of the Wairarapa for surgery.

Eventually cost and compliance issues meant the surgical facility at Glenwood Hospital would close in 1995.

Patients seeking private specialist treatment had to venture outside the district. Rob Irwin travelled back and forth to Boulcott Hospital in Wellington to care for his private patients. Not wanting to leave them following surgery on a Friday, he spent many weekends away from his family, to make sure his patients were well on the road to recovery.

In 1990 Jim Bolger's National Party appointed a young and dynamic Simon Upton as health minister. He encouraged public/private initiatives that improved local access to healthcare. Masterton Hospital Board members, including CEO Jon Peters and Owen Prior joined medical doctors- Rob Dimock, Jon Cleary and Peter



Rob Irwin, Lesley Denholm and Rob Dimock with a portrait of Selina Sutherland.

Vanniasingham in visiting Wairau Hospital in Blenheim. They observed Wairau's public/private partnership with the Churchill Trust, and the Wairarapa Crown Health Enterprise approved their subsequent feasibility study to establish the Selina Sutherland Trust and hospital. They collected money from their fellow doctors for start-up costs and hired Lesley O'Hara, the charge-nurse of Masterton Hospital's Ward 1, as their hospital and nursing manager. This was a role she excelled at for twenty years, before retiring.

"We started out in Ward 1 in 1996, then moved to ward 5 in the old children's hospital once it was refurbished," says Lesley. "We had to educate the public about how it worked with the public hospital. We don't own anything, we lease the premises and operating Theatre time, and apart from some administration staff that we employ, the nurses that work at Selina are employed by the public hospital (now Te Whatu Ora)."

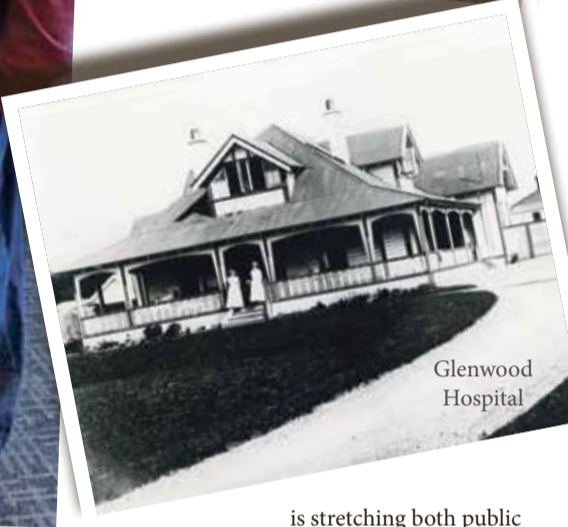
Selina Sutherland Charitable Trust Chair Rob Dimock adds "We always worked in collaboration with the public hospital, donating equipment like \$700,000 worth of orthopaedic drills, providing monitors,

ECG and bladder scanner machines and sponsoring nurses to go on educational courses."

The public/private cooperation was both financial and practical - Lesley O'Hara worked alongside DHB colleagues on growing compliance regulations and quality assurance requirements; Selina Sutherland Hospital provided the DHB with a loan to extend the 'new' 2006 hospital ward and consulting rooms that they lease from seven to ten beds. Selina Sutherland Hospital has supported the public hospital with expertise with difficult operations, provided overflow beds when the public hospital needed them, helped tackle the growing operating waiting lists when contracted to do so, and allowed the public hospital to take over Selina Sutherland during the Covid lockdowns, to ensure capacity for Covid patients. On average, though small, Selina Sutherland Hospital - offering orthopaedic, ophthalmology and gynaecological services - performs about five to seven hundred operations per year.

The doctors who first invested were paid out in full in the early 2000's and thanks to their generosity and efforts, Selina Sutherland Hospital was thriving. Many will be familiar with clinicians - to name but a few - such as Pete and Chris Smith, Tim Matthews, Keith Maslin, Jeff Harrild, Peter Bruwer, Grant Russell, Tim Love, Kris Nair, Alan Shirley, Guy Hingston, Jeremy Earle, Ian Denholm and Konrad Schwanecke - some of whom lived here, while others were visiting specialists. All made a contribution, and have served this community well.

Rob Dimock has voluntarily given his time and effort over 35 years to ensure a robust health service in the Wairarapa. He acknowledges that our growing population



Glenwood Hospital

is stretching both public and private health services, and it's time for growth and change. "The Wairarapa is one of the fastest growing regions in the country. Since Covid, many have grown tired of urban areas and want rural peace and quality of life. The expanding retirement industry of the Wairarapa will create employment and a need for infrastructure. The impact of this growing population creates demand for increased healthcare capacity."

Once again, a group of committed local clinicians are boldly entering a new era of healthcare, leading the building of a new independent private hospital on land they have purchased in Te Ore Ore Road. Aiming at opening in 2027, it will have two Operating Theatres, an endoscopy suite and an MRI scanner, a first in the Wairarapa.

This new well-equipped hospital will enhance the public system by freeing up the ward currently leased by Selina Sutherland Hospital, and making extra Theatre time available in the public hospital. It will also attract a wider range of specialists, nurses, and other hospital staff, keen to make the Wairarapa their home. Working in tandem with their public hospital colleagues and local general practitioners, a new generation of healthcare workers will take up the challenge, and future-proof the availability and longevity of quality local health services.

In the next advertorial in our series on the 'Evolution of Selina Sutherland Hospital,' we will share current surgical services offered at Selina, and introduce some of the dedicated people who work there.



Rob Dimock, Rob Irwin, Lesley Denholm and Chris Smith with some staff of Selina Sutherland Hospital