



The standard of surgery has improved but there is still a great need in terms of trauma care

The in-coming New Zealand Executive Director of Surgical Affairs, Mr Allan Panting, said he had taken on the role because it offered him the opportunity to assist Fellows across New Zealand. Mr Panting is commencing in the new position somewhat faster than he had anticipated because of the recent retirement of his predecessor John Simpson and is currently in the process of reducing his clinical commitments and winding up his role as Deputy Chairman of the Court of Examiners.

"I had no intention of taking on the position of Executive Director of Surgical Affairs but once I gave it some thought I could see that the role had value – separate from the surgeon's

focus on the individual patient – in terms of assisting Fellows which would in turn have a positive impact on the broader public," he said.

He said he saw a role in ensuring that surgery was promoted to government, to make sure that funding was available to meet the needs of surgical patients and addressing training and workforce needs. One of four orthopaedic surgeons in the South Island town of Nelson, he said he would continue with some clinical work during his tenure as a way of keeping in touch with the needs of Fellows. Mr Panting described himself as a generalist with a strong interest in trauma but that he had now reduced his spinal and paediatric work.

Mr Panting completed Fellowships in

Melbourne and Edinburgh before returning to Christchurch. He said he decided on the move to Nelson after realising the family sacrifices required by an "impossible" workload expectation in Christchurch. After moving there, he became involved in the New Zealand Orthopaedic Association and was later appointed to the Court of Examiners.

"I thought that maybe there was a place and a need for an ordinary surgeon to fulfil this role rather than someone from the higher end of academia. I believed there could be value in someone asking what should be expected of ordinary surgeons by the community and then working with them and for them to meet those expectations," he said.

*"It's probably at a stage now where I can step back a bit which is great, but I will probably continue to visit off and on. I think I get more out of Vietnam than I could ever contribute."*

For the past four years he has been Deputy Chair of the Court assisting in the administration of the Final Fellowship examination. "I was interested in the exercise of how to create the best exams, how to make them as fair as possible and how to combine both of these aspects to ensure the most competent surgeons possible," he said.

The twin challenges of an expanded workforce and aging population were increasingly important issues. Mr Panting was for a number of years the convenor of the Workforce Committee of the New Zealand Orthopaedic Association and said the issue was of great interest to him.

"I have always found this an interesting issue because it's not just about having an adequate supply of surgeons it's also about getting them where they are needed. I'm keen to investigate how to make regional positions, in particular, attractive to younger surgeons even just for a defined period of time rather than a lifetime as a way of meeting the different aspirations of a new generation of surgeons. John Simpson and Antony Raymont had recently completed an extensive analysis of New Zealand surgical workforce issues but there is still some work to be done on that," he said.

"There is a lot of effort now going into how to address both the health care needs associated with an ageing population and the recent training bulge. So much of surgical training is like an apprenticeship and while we now have more Trainees we only have a limited supply of surgeons able to train them," he said.

"This means we constantly face the risk of over-burdening the very people the system depends on so there is quite a lot of careful balancing that needs to be done as we seek to expand the workforce."



Allan Panting on a biking holiday in Costa Rica

Throughout this most recent part of his career, he has also used his trauma skills during multiple visits to Vietnam. Those visits, supported by NZAid and the NZ Vietnam Health Trust, are focussed on the town of Quy Nhon, located approximately 600 km north of Saigon. With a local population of 400,000 and a regional population of two million, the town is now becoming one of Vietnam's major ports.

He said that when he first visited more than ten years ago, the main need was access to equipment, the skills to use it and guidance while doing new procedures.

"I did some surgery then but my role was more about assisting by guiding the local surgeons through procedures they had not done before. Since then the standard of surgery has improved but there is still a great need in terms of trauma care," Mr Panting said.

"Most of the trauma injuries we see there follow road trauma, industrial accidents and trauma in the home caused by cooking fires for example. Yet the initial care for patients is still very poor, they have no ambulance service and so the patients often arrive by car or truck and are not treated as trauma patients when they do arrive. Having been an Early Management of Severe Trauma (EMST) instructor for some years I was able to commence a program of basic courses in pre-hospital and emergency care based on that model (Primary Trauma Care).

"These have been very enthusiastically



Demonstrating primary assessment for PTC course

supported because the medical staff see the need and are always so keen to learn. Better outcomes for such patients will result over the next few years as a consequence of improved knowledge and the increasing availability of better resources," he said.

Mr Panting said the courses are developed so that local people can acquire the skills to successfully run them and that he hoped to visit Vietnam again later this year to help maintain the momentum and to guide the trainers during courses.

"It's probably at a stage now where I can step back a bit which is great, but I will probably continue to visit off and on. I think I get more out of Vietnam than I could ever contribute," he said.

"I saw it as a challenge at the time I was first approached and chose to rise to it but I never thought how much it would give to me. They are wonderful people and I learn more from them every time I visit."