

# Covid-19 Delta outbreak: Murupara Medical Centre slammed over social media post

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Murupara Medical Centre has been slammed for "quackery" and "misuse of power" after one of its social media posts claimed betadine, mouthwash, and vitamins could form part of a Covid-19 "first-aid kit".

The social media post headed "Community Covid First Aid Kit" contains a number of items - including Betadine, essential oils or cetylpyridinium chloride, as well as vitamin supplements.

Dr Bernard Conlon and his wife, Dr Britta Noske, are two of four GPs at the medical centre.

It was reported earlier this month that the Medical Council is investigating Conlon, the town's GP of 30 years, for comments he made about the Pfizer vaccine - prompting hundreds of people to protest in the town earlier this month.

Conlon defended the social media post, saying the practice believed in a "variety of approaches" to improve immune response to the virus.

New Zealand Medical Association chair Dr Alistair Humphrey told the Rotorua Daily Post he believed there was no evidence supporting what he describes as the post's "damaging" claims and, in his opinion, doctors in communities such as Murupara should ensure vaccine rates were high.

As of Wednesday morning, Murupara has 38.6 per cent of the eligible population fully vaccinated, and 52.3 per cent have had their first dose, according to the Government's Covid-19 website.

Humphrey said, in his opinion, it was a "tragedy" and he believed the medical centre was misusing its power and he believed some would interpret the post as suggesting mouthwash, betadine, and vitamins would prevent and treat Covid but this was, in his view, "not sound advice. There is no evidence for that".

Humphrey said betadine had some bactericidal and potentially some viricidal qualities.

But he said some people may find it "extremely unpleasant" and some may react to it.

"Evidence-base is the basis of medical practice and the only evidence at the moment is that of vaccination."

Conlon was respected by the Murupara community after decades of providing quality care, he said.

Humphrey said, in his opinion, the post showed the "damage" a medical centre can do when communicating with the public.

In his view: "This is truly a misuse of power" and the first-aid kits suggested were "quackery".

He believed the post was "damaging, and it's concerning".

He said, in his opinion, doctors, in a community such as Murupara, should ensure there were high vaccination rates.

Humphrey believed the centre's post appeared to be putting the community at risk, and should be removed.

He believes the advice was contrary to the first principle of the Medical Association's code of ethics which stated patient wellbeing needed to be the first priority.

In response, Conlon said he was inclined to follow doctors who had treated Covid patients versus those locally who "may hold prestigious positions" but had not individually treated patients themselves.

"I have worked to the best of my ability for the last 30 years to improve the welfare of this small community," he said.

He said he had admitted four patients with illnesses that he suspected were from the vaccine and said there was "no doubt" that there were risks associated with the vaccine, and with risk, there needed to be choice.

He said it was with this in mind that he shared with his patients the pros and the cons of this intervention and then leave them to decide.

Conlon said the practice believed in a "variety of approaches" to improve immune response to the virus.

He cited two websites that he said had input from ongoing studies and other medical professionals from around the world who had been dealing with the pandemic for months.

Conlon said he would use these sites to contest those who said the mouthwash, betadine, and vitamins had no evidence backing.

When asked why other health professionals did not also use the websites, he said he could not speak for other doctors.

"We're actively looking to see what's happening overseas and we're actively trying to piggyback onto winning strategies that our colleagues overseas, who are 18 months into this, have found to be beneficial."

"It's called self-education," he said when asked how he found the websites.

"All I can do is base my decisions on what I see is the best evidence."

He said it was the responsibility of GPs to be active in managing Covid-19 patients.

Conlon said he acknowledged the benefits of the vaccine as well as the risks which were more so than he had with the flu vaccine.

"I focus my energies on what I assess would be my areas of responsibility and accountability towards early treatment protocols."

He said he respected people's decisions to get vaccinated if it was an informed and free decision.

But he said he disagreed with the "distasteful" mandate.

Bay of Plenty District Health Board Covid Programme operations manager Brent Gilbert-De Rios said it was "not appropriate" to comment because it was a matter between the GP and medical council.

He said the Covid-19 vaccine was still the best protection against the virus and the health board was working with the district's communities, including Murupara, on their preparedness and response.

Medical Council of New Zealand chair Dr Curtis Walker said the council took these matters "very seriously" but could not comment on individual cases due to privacy.

He said protecting the public health and safety of people in New Zealand was at the centre of all the council's decisions.

Walker said doctors were expected to be aware of, and comply with, its published standards of clinical and ethical practice.

In the most serious cases, the council could suspend or place conditions on a doctor's practice to protect the public from harm, if found to not be complying with the standards.

He said the council could refer non-compliance to a Professional Conduct Committee (PCC) for investigation.

A Ministry of Health spokeswoman said the vaccine was "our number one protection against the virus".

"Should there be a promising treatment that fits with the likely scenarios facing New Zealand in future, the ministry would work with Pharmac and Medsafe."

She said Kiwis can protect themselves against the virus through being fully vaccinated and basic safety habits like social distancing, wearing masks, washing and sanitising hands and using the tracer app.