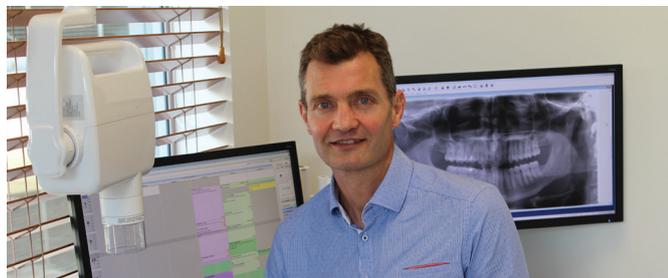


AP programme easy, clear, reduces barriers to care – oral and maxillofacial surgeon



Westlake Dental Specialists owner and director Peter Hill

It's not uncommon for an encounter with the 'Big C' to trigger a change in one's career or lifestyle.

For Auckland oral and maxillofacial surgeon Peter Hill, going through a course of chemotherapy for bowel cancer, and coming out healthy, prompted him to retire from public practice and open the Takapuna private clinic Westlake Dental Specialists.

That was in 2013. Today, he works full time at the Takapuna head office and has expanded the clinic to Auckland's Silverdale and South Island city Queenstown.

"The lifestyle in North Shore is great and it's allowed my life outside of work. I spend a lot of time riding and swimming and enjoying the lifestyle on the North Shore," Peter says.

AP claiming process means fewer delays

Running a multi-branch practice means policies and processes need to be consistent and streamlined.

But Peter, also the clinic's director, says one of the biggest issues Westlake Dental Specialists had before becoming a Southern Cross Affiliated Provider (AP) was a lack of clarity during patient consultations.

Staff were sometimes unable to answer patients' questions about cover, and incomplete paperwork or inconsistent administration often caused treatment delays, Peter says.

"There were variables we couldn't control because the patient couldn't do anything until they went back to their insurer," he explains.

Joining the AP programme in 2014 eliminated those problems for Southern Cross members. "The AP process [via the online system Provider Web] enables us to update our patients at the time of consultation regarding the likelihood of claim approval and it allows patients to make informed decisions at the time of consultation," Peter says.

Checking cover on the spot: "Satisfying"

Using Provider Web, multiple clinicians can log on at once to check different members' eligibility for cover.

This is an important benefit for Westlake Dental Specialists, a busy clinic with many workstations.

"It's very satisfying telling patients on the spot they are covered," Peter says.

Provider Web eliminates paperwork, saves time

Receptionist Skye Viljoen does most of the Provider Web administration and says the system eliminates manual, offline work.

About 60 per cent of the clinic's insured patients are Southern Cross members and Skye estimates using Provider Web saves her about two hours a week.

"We no longer have to complete laborious and repetitive paperwork and chase up payments for the majority of our insured patients."

A returned focus to patient care

Further, all these benefits help lower barriers to care for patients.

Prior to Westlake Dental Specialists becoming an AP, patients sometimes phoned up at the last minute and deferred necessary treatment, i.e. removal of symptomatic wisdom teeth, because they hadn't sorted their insurance, Peter says.

"Teenagers would come in for consultation about painful wisdom teeth and not tell mum to organise the insurance and then there was this frantic scramble at the last minute."

The AP programme certainly streamlined that significantly, he adds. "It means we can focus on patient care and leave the insurance questions for the administration team."

Relationship with Southern Cross benefits members

Peter says the ongoing connection with Southern Cross' contract managers is also valuable.

"The contract managers have always been approachable and keen to learn more about the service we provide their members. We have had one of them visit the practice and watch surgery being performed," he says.

"I think the closer relationship brought about by the AP agreement and these type of encounters has benefited Southern Cross patients. The relationship with Southern Cross is one of mutual trust, and as a consequence, access to funding for oral surgery has improved for Southern Cross members."



Westlake Dental Specialists staff: oral and maxillofacial surgeon Hamish Cameron, Peter Hill and receptionist Skye Viljoen

Westlake Dental Specialists is an AP to Southern Cross Health Society for selected services. Head online at www.healthcarefinder.co.nz to see which AP services are available at the clinic.