

Cancer care controversy grips New Zealand

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Many New Zealand residents suffering from skin cancers will reportedly have to wait for surgery until their tumors become larger and worsen.

The New Zealand Health Ministry's action is designed to improve nationwide medical waiting lists, but the ruling has angered both citizens and physicians.

New Zealand Plastic Surgeons Association President Colin Calcinaï called for health officials to be honest about the system's limitations, saying, "It is wrong for the public to think that just because they have cancer they will get treatment."

Skin cancer patients, other than those with melanoma, are given a score of 1 to 9, depending upon severity. Previously, people scoring 7 or above qualified for surgery, but now the threshold has risen to 8, The Wellington Dominion Post reported Wednesday.

Since general practitioners only remove tumors up to category 4, patients classed as category 5 to 7 must wait for surgery until their cancer worsens.

Calcinaï told the newspaper the ruling means category 5-7 patients will be sent back to their personal physician "to get God knows what."

Government officials had no comment, the Dominion Post reported.

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