

New clinic gives health WOFs

Financial backing comes from mix of private money and community trusts

By John Maslin
john.maslin@wanganuichronicle.col.nz

THE work being done at a new medical centre in Wanganui will be promoted to the Government as an enterprise that could be adopted elsewhere.

That's the view of Whanganui MP Chester Borrows after he visited MyLife Medical at 45 Taupo Quay.

The clinic, set up with financial backing from a mix of private and community trust funding, is a specialist medical fitness facility committed to improving health and well-being through preventative and diagnostic testing.

It does this using state-of-the-art equipment to carry out body composition and exercise testing. In simpler terms, call it a "warrant of fitness" health check.

River City Health Trust, which includes a small group of retired local businessmen and doctors, came up with the idea of the clinic, because they saw a need in the community to reduce the incidence of lifestyle diseases, in particular diabetes and obesity.

Doctors and consultants include Dr Robin McLachlan and Dr Bevan Chilcott, Dr David Warburton and Professor Steve Stannard, Massey University School of Sport and Exercise, and others including retired optician Mike Webber.

Mr Webber said initial discussions were around the idea of a health facility which had a strong connection with the Whanganui River but that broadened to cover community health focusing on preventative medicine.

"We've got a relationship with Massey University as well but they will focus on high-end athletes."

Clinical director Eion Walker said when he was first attracted to the job it was about the high performance side of things.

"But as things have turned out we're more about being at the top of the cliff rather than the bottom. Most of our work



BODY BUSINESS: Whanganui MP Chester Borrows (left), gets the lowdown on an analysis machine from Eion Walker, clinical director at MyLife Medical. The equipment provides body composition body fat analysis in less than 30 seconds.

PHOTO/BEVAN CONLEY

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is around stress testing and filling the gap between the GPs and hospitals," Mr Walker said. "GPs are not always sure what they're dealing with and sometimes can't refer their clients to the hospital so they send them here to get some clarity about if they're dealing with a cardiac problem or not."

He and Dr McLachlan do the stress testing which is then reported back to the doctors.

"Some of the people referred to us are just coming here for a 'warrant of fitness' check. We've got a bio-impedance device which measures their body composition, what their fat and muscle percentage is, water, protein, minerals, everything.

"We can also do tests to look at lung function as well as submaximal tests to find out what a person's fitness level is."

People don't need a GP referral, in fact most of their clients walk in off the street.

The clinic opened at the beginning of March with assessments taking between 15 minutes to 75 minutes and ranging in price from \$35 to \$235.

Mr Borrows said he had been trying to "shake the tree" of the Minister of Health to take more interest in what MyLife Medical was doing.

"This operation is right on track to where the Government wants to go with community health. And it's also about people taking more responsibility for their own wellbeing," he said.

"There are a lot of people who are keen on doing that because they're staying active longer.

"They want to do things in retirement but they want to have an idea of their level of fitness before they tackle the cycle trail or walk the track.

"That's why I want to get the minister to have a look at what's happening here."

Mr Borrows said businesses were now doing things like drug testing and giving staff flu injections."

"It seems strange to me that they wouldn't want to do the third leg of the treble and have their health risk checked through what this clinic can provide."

Dr McLachlan said the clinic really had

its inception more than 30 years ago. "At [that] stage the NZ Federation of Sports Medicine was interested in setting up laboratories around the country. We started up the Sports Medicine Trust in Wanganui in the 1970s and we were testing rowers and cyclists.

"I carried it into my normal practice and adapted the tests to suit patients and this is exactly what the clinic is providing now."

He said with GPs under increasing pressure, it was hard for them to give a patient a thorough physical check.

"Now they can send them to us for a cardio-vascular test and we get the results back to them."

With much of the equipment portable, the clinic can take its testing to the worksite.

Mr Walker said at the base level the clinic was interested in finding out those who were at risk of cardio-vascular disease, talking to them about that risk and what lifestyle changes were needed to diminish that risk.