

Rotary Bulletin – 4 May 2026

Next Brew Union

24 April 2026, Friday 5.00 pm.

Youth Music Festival

23 May 2026. Contact Steve Paterson.

Circus Quirkus

28 May 2 shows at PNBHS. Contact Mike.

Monday lunchtime 11 May 2026

Guest Speakers:

Hannah Hawley and Helen Fitzsimonms

“Fruit Flies and the Brain: A Powerful Partnership in Scientific Discovery”

President	President Dave
Intro/Thanks	Martin Townend
Sergeant	Nigel Withell
Corporal	Nick Kaspers
Parting Thought	Ron Dobson
Bulletin Editor	Dave Gaynor
Attendance	Martin Townend

Summary of the Speech by

Dr Alberto Ramirez-Rodriguez, Clinical Director: Surgical Services, PN Hospital

“Robot Assisted Surgery – a big step forward”



Dr Alberto Ramirez is supporting a Palmerston North Hospital Foundation project to fund a surgical robot to improve local surgical and cancer care.

He explained how robotic surgery builds on keyhole (laparoscopic) surgery: the surgeon remains fully in control, but the robot enhances precision (e.g., filters tremor, enables greater range of instrument movement such as full wrist rotation, and supports very fine, repeatable actions). The system uses a surgeon console with high-quality 3D magnified vision and hand controls, linked to robotic arms at the patient’s side.



Alberto stressed the technology is established (used millions of times worldwide) and often considered the “gold standard” for certain procedures. Benefits include safer surgery, quicker recovery, and helping recruitment/retention of staff in regions where staffing is difficult.

Benefits of Robotic Surgery

- Improved dexterity
- Increased accuracy
- Magnified 3D vision on screen
- Remote learning and supervision
- Less fatigue
- Eliminate hand tremor
- Less risk of infection
- Less blood loss
- Fewer blood transfusions
- Less pain and scarring
- Quicker recovery
- Quicker return to normal function

He outlined broad use cases across specialties—especially urology (notably prostate cancer surgery), bowel/cancer surgery, gynaecology, endometriosis surgery, and some ENT/throat cancer procedures. He considers that it would be transformative for a large regional cancer catchment (about 600,000 people in the MidCentral area). He notes Palmerston North is unusual in lacking access to a robot in either public or private care.

On funding, he says Health New Zealand is in an austerity period and is prioritising capacity and infrastructure, so a robot is unlikely to be government-funded soon. The target robot costs about NZ\$2.5m + GST including staff training and an initial service plan, with Health NZ committed to ongoing maintenance and training after the first year and to managing procurement.

He reports that the PN Hospital Foundation has received strong early fundraising momentum (around NZ\$2m already pledged before the official launch) from major local donors and grants (including Lions). He thanked the combined Rotary Clubs of Palmerston North and Awapuni pledging \$70,000.

CONTRIBUTIONS...SO FAR

- Local Donor: 500K
- Lions Foundation Grant: 400K
- Awapuni and Palmerston North Rotary Clubs: 70K
- Individuals and businesses: 30K
- PN Hospital Regional Cancer Treatment Trust: 500K
- Local Donor: 500K

In answer to questions:

- surgeons will be trained within their own specialties (not as general “robot surgeons”);
- training can be faster than early keyhole surgery due to simulators and remote learning and supervision;
- current operating theatres are largely ready without rebuild;
- the proposed Hugo system is significantly cheaper than Da Vinci with minimal practical gain;
- typical device life is ~7–10 years with software updates;
- and standard anaesthetic techniques are still used;
- with modern care enabling some same-day discharge for certain procedures.



Parting Thought:

Rodney Wong: An old Chinese proverb.

“With enough effort, an iron bar can be ground into a needle.”

**UNITE
FOR
GOOD**