



Dear Colleague

Haematologist Natalia Gavrilova is excited about the new developments in the field in which she specialises...



When, as a child, Natalia Gavrilova was asked to write an essay on why she wanted to be a doctor, she wrote, "Because they wear white coats." Ask her now, as a leading haematologist, commanding international respect, and she talks about the excitement of advances and breakthroughs in her specialised field.

"There are now some life-changing techniques and technologies that offer patients new options, less pain and better quality of life," she says. "It is a wonderful field to be in. We are seeing new medications and treatment regimens that make a huge difference."

Natalia is a consultant haematologist at Waikato Hospital with an interest in malignant and general haematology. She is also a haematopathologist, determining and diagnosing the cause of blood diseases, at Hamilton's Pathlab.

At Braemar Hospital, she is a consultant in both general and malignant haematology, which includes patients with abnormal blood counts, iron overload and deficiency, lymphadenopathy for investigation, diagnosis of lymphoma

(both high and low-grade), Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia (CLL), myeloma and plasma cell disorders such as myelodysplastic syndrome and myeloproliferative neoplasms.

Treatments at Braemar include chemotherapy and immunotherapy for patients with CLL, lymphoma and myeloma, and supervised treatment and long-term follow-up for the patients. Chronic blood transfusion support, intravenous iron therapy, and bone marrow biopsy are also available.

Natalia grew up in Russia, where she completed her early medical studies, before emigrating to Israel in 2000 to take up a position at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem – Israel's largest and most advanced bone marrow transplant unit.

To undertake her qualifications, she had to learn Hebrew and English, two languages she didn't speak when she left Russia.

She had expected to work in the United States, but learned her qualifications were also recognised in New Zealand, a country she had read about in the children's adventure story, *The Children of Captain Grant*, by Jules Verne. In the book, the children of a lost sea captain set sail to find their father and their travels take them to South America, Australia and New Zealand. Natalia was bewitched by the tale and believed New Zealand would be a good place for their family to live. She and her husband Evgueni and their children arrived in New Zealand in 2006.

She says, while most of the breakthroughs in haematology are happening in Europe and North America, where the most advanced research is being undertaken, New Zealand is making significant gains. "For example, CLL, patients, who used to be treated with chemotherapy, can now take a tablet, which is targeted and provides a far less toxic treatment. You can literally see the lymph nodes melting away."

Bone marrow biopsies can now also be done pain free, using the anaesthetic agent Pentrox, which makes a huge difference, especially to young people who have dense bones.

Her work was also at the forefront of a new treatment offered at Waikato

Hospital. In 2013, she treated a patient who had an aggressive form of lymphoma. He did not respond to initial treatments and appeared to be facing death. But Natalia conducted a thorough literature review and found an article in the *New England Journal of Medicine* detailing a new chemotherapy regime for aggressive lymphomas, which had been used only in a handful of cases overseas. The regime - DA (dose-adjusted) EPOCH-R - delivers the chemicals as a long, 96 hours' infusion and has a higher chance of killing rapidly dividing lymphoma cells as they enter into cell cycle.

The treatment was successful, and the patient recovered. He subsequently wrote a book about his experience. Natalia has since used the treatment successfully for other aggressive lymphomas and has also presented on it to the Haematology Society of Australia & New Zealand. It is now the preferred regime in New Zealand and other countries for Double Hit Lymphoma.

She says her work in the private sector at Braemar Hospital will offer new options and timely investigations and treatments for patients with a range of haematological problems.



Dr Greg Spark – Deputy Chairman

Dr Natalia Gavrilova

QUALIFICATIONS

- MD (Omsk, Russia, 1997)
- RACP (2013)
- RCPA (2013)

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AREAS OF SPECIALISATION

Malignant and general haematology with interests in Lymphoma, Myeloma, CLL.

SPECIALIST TRAINING

Bachelor of Medicine and Master Degree in Medicine, Omsk State Medical University, Russian Federation 1997

Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, 2013

Fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, 2013

POSITIONS & MEMBERSHIPS

Consultant Haematologist,
Waikato DHB

Consultant Haematologist and Haematopathologist, Pathlab, Hamilton

Principal Investigator Myeloma, Lymphoma clinical trials,
Waikato DHB

Haematology teaching coordinator, Waikato DHB