

Returning 69-year-old to jail 'disgusting'

By ANTONIO BRADLEY - The Dominion Post

Last updated 05:00 29/07/2010

Consigning a 69-year-old man with Parkinson's disease and suspected dementia to prison throws the spotlight on a health system unable to care for the ageing population, critics say.

The man, who has been held in Rimutaka Prison for a month on assault and indecent assault charges, appeared in Upper Hutt District Court yesterday and was "regrettably" sent back for a further fortnight as there was nowhere else for him, Judge Geoffrey Ellis said.

It is alleged the man, whose name is suppressed, grabbed the breasts of a fellow resident at his previous care home and assaulted a health worker by "shaking his walking stick".

The Health Ministry says it has been unsuccessful with "extensive" efforts to find the man care, and his family will not house him.

Judge Ellis ordered a report to assess whether the man was physically and mentally able to participate in court proceedings.

Grey Power president Les Howard blamed the health system yesterday for having its priorities wrong and said jailing the man was "absolutely bloody disgusting".

"With the baby boomers coming on stream there will be a lot more aged people ... There's going to be an increase in dementia patients ... so I think it's bloody poor planning on behalf of the DHBs for not having the bloody facilities ready."

Defence lawyer Michael Bott said the ministry had discarded his client. "It appears the ministry doesn't have the funding or the will to do anything at all."

The criminal justice system needed to change to better deal with mentally ill and disabled people, he said.

Health Minister Tony Ryall said yesterday he was confident the ministry was acting appropriately.

Ministry disability services chief adviser Lester Mundell said it was satisfied the man's health and disability support needs were being met in prison, but was working with Corrections and health and disability organisations to find an alternative place for him.

Justice Minister Simon Power said legislation provided options for dealing with mentally impaired people, including the power to find a defendant unfit to stand trial and to acquit defendants on account of insanity.