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For Immediate Release



Multiple Sclerosis NZ Welcomes Immigration Backdown on Northland Visa Case

Multiple Sclerosis New Zealand (MSNZ) says it's delighted immigration officials have "seen good sense" and reversed their decision to now allow the Canadian husband of a New Zealand school teacher visa entry to this country.

"We are delighted for his family, who are often disregarded by authorities in such cases" says MSNZ Vice-President Neil Woodhams.

"It's the least Immigration New Zealand could have done and it reflects the reality of the situation that just because someone has MS doesn't mean they can't continue to work and make a useful contribution to society" he says.

Jimmy Lambert has multiple sclerosis yet works full-time in his native Quebec. His wife Juanita Craig reported through the media that Immigration New Zealand (INZ) officials had denied him a Partner of a New Zealand Work Visa and would not let him into the country to live with or even visit her or the couple's two children in Northland. Mr Lambert has not seen his family for eight months, since attempting to fly out for a visit last October when he was reportedly turned away by officials.

Ms Craig, who teaches at Kamo High School, says an INZ medical assessor last year ruled that Mr Lambert did not meet the acceptable standard of health for entry and that his condition was likely to impose significant costs on the New Zealand health system.

However, Ms Craig disputed this, stating that his medical needs would be relatively modest, requiring only six weekly intravenous injections of medication plus a six-monthly specialist visit, the cost of which would be covered by his own health insurance.

In a statement yesterday MSNZ called the INZ decision both short-sighted and non-sensical, stating that Immigration officials clearly don't understand that due to the newer MS drugs patients can live full lives with minimal disruption, working and participating in normal activities.

However, it says the news that last night, following media inquiries, INZ has reversed its decision and apologised to Ms Craig, now offering to grant a 12-month partnership work visa to Mr Lambert, is welcome.

"We often see discrimination by both employers and society towards MS patients due to the fact others don't necessarily understand that with modern drugs the prognosis for them is significantly better than in times gone by when there was little the health system could do for them" says Neil Woodhams.

MSNZ still has concerns however that seeing the visa granted to Mr Lambert is for only 12 months, more work may yet be required to ensure the family can stay together in the long term. It says it's very happy to work with INZ to promote better understanding of the disease.

ENDS

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