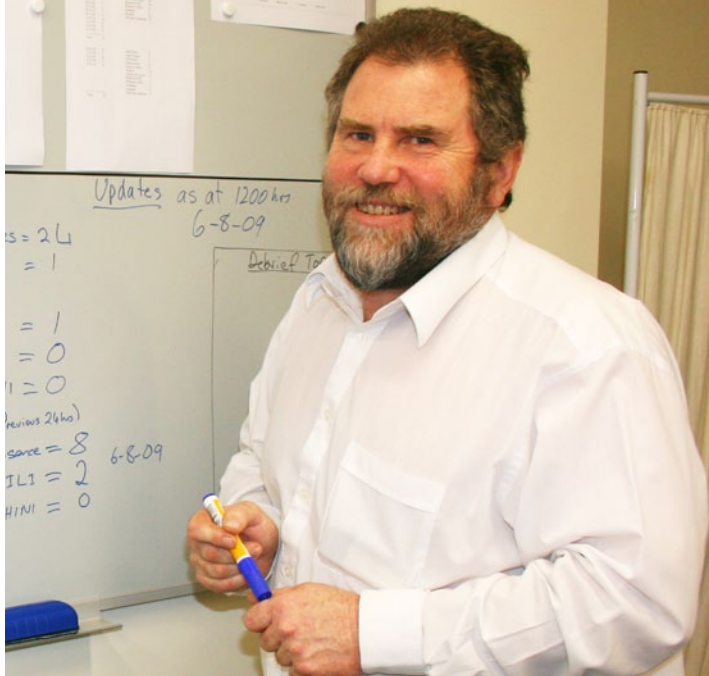


A Day in the Life of...

An Emergency Management Coordinator



■ Mike Broker

Years of preparing for an influenza pandemic are paying off as the country responds to the swine flu outbreak.

It's no different in Taranaki. The DHB has planned for a pandemic and taken part in the exercises just like the rest of the country.

But this time it's for real and all those carefully laid plans are being put into practice.

Planning and preparing are a large focus for TDHB Emergency Management Coordinator Mike Broker. "Without preparing for a response to an emergency you're on the back foot if anything does happen," he says. "An element of preparedness can save an incident becoming a disaster. It's absolutely vital, especially in the health sector."

Pandemic Influenza (H1N1) 09, known as swine flu, was first identified in New Zealand on 25 April. By early June, the first evidence of community spread was seen. There are signs the number of people with flu-illnesses is on the decrease but this may reverse at any time.

"We were aware of the possibility of an influenza pandemic of some sort but when swine flu appeared on our shores it was a wake up call," Mike says.

The health sector is the lead agency

for pandemics and responsible for providing a response.

Taranaki DHB's planning has included an Emerging Infectious Disease Plan, which helped shape our response. "It was worth doing, those big exercises and the local planning," Mike says.

He says the planning can be used for other emergencies, such as volcanic eruptions, floods, earthquakes, hospital-based incidents or mass casualties.

Mike became the DHB's first full-time Emergency Management Coordinator in 2007. His background is in mental health – as a psychiatric assistant, an enrolled nurse, manager, and quality and risk coordinator. The coordinator role gave him a taste of emergency planning. "It was a small component but it captured my imagination, and it was an area I wanted to get into."

His current job involves advocating emergency preparedness across hospital services and the wider Taranaki health sector.

Another important area is establishing networks and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders – before emergencies happen. Responding to the swine flu outbreak has involved the DHB

working closely with Civil Defence, PHOs and other organisations.

"If we didn't already have those relationships there'd be a lag," Mike says. "We have strong ties with our local Civil Defence, and share training and exercises."

Mike also works closely with the Midland Region DHB Emergency Planning Group, and is a member of the TDHB Incident Management Team which was set up to respond to the swine flu outbreak.

His job is varied and can be full on when there is an emergency. "There's an element of working under pressure, and that drives people," he says.

While planning for emergencies is imperative, Mike says there's nothing quite like a real situation to learn from.

He already views his job differently because of the swine flu outbreak. "There have been significant things learned at all levels." He says there will be plenty of analysing to see how New Zealand coped with the influenza outbreak. "And things will work even better next time."

Mike encourages departments to review their emergency plans each year – not just when there's an emergency.