

My Role in the Cyclone Gabrielle Gisborne Hospital Relief Effort

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As you know already Cyclone Gabrielle wreaked havoc on the North Island Hawke's Bay and Te Tairāwhiti areas. An email went out in late February asking for assistance in the area. They needed lots of people from nurses, doctors, administrators, and other officials. A week after I registered I got the call. From then, it all went very fast. I found myself on a jet plane on 02/03 to Gisborne by way of Wellington.

The notification email made it seem like I was going to a war zone. All of the visitors I asked felt the same. One of my colleagues in Gisborne put it this way, the email made it seem like we were going to be in the 70's smash comedy-drama MASH unit. We were asked to bring a grab-bag, sleeping bags, water purification tablets, toilet paper, to name a few. We received a number of documents regarding mental trauma, offers of assistance, people with whom we can talk to.

Upon arrival I met up with the local organisers. This included members of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC), Chief Nurse Seritia Karauria, and Deputy Chief Nurse Roger Huntington. I was introduced to the hospital coordinator Michelle Torrie. She plays the role of the Duty Manager. Together we decided that I could be best put to use at Ward 8, a combination ortho/surgical/rehab ward. I was introduced to Ward 8 CNM Simmy Taitapanuit. This all happened within the morning of my arrival.

Simmy showed me around the ward. We met the staff. We worked out a roster. She was accommodating to my schedule as we worked it out. I believed, especially considering the circumstances, that one day of orientation was acceptable. I preferred AM's and ended up doing one day off and one day on for about a week and then larger groups of days. As it would turn out, I ended up even taking more days as was required. Later on, I was asked to help out in Ward 9, more of a surgical only ward. When asked again to do Ward 9 I said yes again. All in all, it was 5 days in a row which was acceptable.





Regarding living arrangements, I was introduced to my home away from home. It was a large 2 bedroom flat complete with a toilet, shower, lounge, TV, washing machine/dryer in their own room, dining area, kitchen, working stove, plates, silverware, and everything I needed to live. I was the sole resident. I had

clean towels, plenty of soap, and a locking door. I even received a car full of fuel for the weekends. I received free food from the cafeteria, anything I wanted.



That is not to say there were no disaster related problems. There was a shortage of safe water generally, though it was safe for my area. There were signs everywhere to conserve water. The main source of water was far less than what would normally be used. Roads were washed out. Bridges damaged. I talked to a bunch of people that had their houses damaged. Apparently, river damaged houses smell really bad. The person from Hamilton on my flight had family in the area and he sent me some photos.



The following week I was moved to a more dormitory living situation. I had all of the same living accoutrements, but now I had a single residence with 6 filled bedrooms. There were people around all the time which was nice for a change.



On my off time I watched a lot of movies. Later on when I had roomies, I went out for dinner and just hung around chatting with others. I had several nurses and several public health officers. It was fascinating to learn about what they do. They worked on the public health issues associated with the disaster. They indicated they were not extremely busy. Possibly more importantly, they ensured the public knew they were being taken care of. It's far better to have people and not be used than need people and not have them!

I was able to get a car over the weekends that I was there. I used this to go shopping at the local Pak'nSave and generally visit the area. The town was busy, all stores were open. Occasionally, I would see some reminders such as a bridge covered in river junk, muddy areas, and signs of obvious flooding. I had the opportunity to do a bit of walking around nearby which was awesome. I walked to the airport once and was able to sweet-talk my way up into the tower so I could get a good view of the surrounding area.









In terms of work, I felt quite comfortable with what was happening. The uniforms we wore were different, but much of the work was quite similar. I could use my skills to good effect and I was able to learn some stuff there. Every person I ran into was quite approachable and pleasant. I did hear stories to the contrary, but I did not personally experience that. It was a relaxed, chill atmosphere.

One really interesting aspect was that I found they focused hard on HCA's. Every shift included 2-3 competent HCA's. This had the tendency to free up my time to spend more time on nursing aspects. Time and time again I would look into a patient and find that the HCA's were already onto them giving them the care they needed. I did not have to direct them, it just happened. That might be something interesting to see here at WDHB.

Having spent time in a ward at WDHB that provides spinal cares, it was second nature to me to take care of the spinal patient who arrived on the ward. Higher acuity patients are often transported back to WDHB for further care. I think I was able to add to the ward.

Overall, the trip was a good one. I was able to take away some lessons while still helping out people who really needed it. They took good care of me and I would do it again.