

Canadian tackles COVID-19 in New Zealand
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Kia Ora! Wow! What a cracker of a year “down under” with the Royal New Zealand Air Force (RNZAF). I had left Nova Scotia in July 2019 and headed to NZ for a “working holiday,” as an Occupational Health Nurse at RNZAF Base Woodbourne, a key recruit and air trades training base, on the South Island, where I soon discovered there were lots of fun words to learn. Fortunately, Kiwis are a friendly bunch and always helpful to help out a puzzled Canadian mate. “See you in the joe room” meant the coffee break room, where members meet with military precision for a chinwag and quick trivia quiz.

It was great to see members’ embrace healthy living and wellness at work, such as a yoga classes on lunch break, attending health promotion activities, and active living. My role was to provide health assessment, education and conduct occupational health monitoring such as for respiratory, audiometry, and hearing protection, and hazardous exposure protection.

Similar to the Canadian Forces, New Zealand Defense Force is often called on for assistance following natural disasters, like the bushfires in Australia, floods, the volcanic eruption requiring search and rescue and recovery missions at White Island – and I found out that earthquakes are a fairly common event in NZ. With much of the country inaccessible by road, it's easy to understand why air and naval defense resources and trained personnel are so critical.

By mid-March, 2020, RNZAF Base Woodbourne had been gearing up for weeks preparing for an operational response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, starting with OP Preserve and moving into OP Protect. Specialist advice and training was requested early on to ensure the Base had initiated control measures such as social distancing and strict hygiene regimes. It was interesting to see members marching in open order.

As an Occupational Health Nurse with the Directorate of Air Force Safety and Health



(DASH), I assisted with the delivery of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) training and infection control through health and hygiene briefs. Providing advice on respiratory protection is a regular part of my daily work, ensuring personnel select PPE that it is compatible with the task they are performing.

From the start of the Alert I made my way around Base Woodbourne (keeping the proper physical distancing and restricting group numbers in mind) and delivered numerous in-person group education sessions to medics, emergency response groups in pre-deployment training mode, students on course, and to the cooks, caterers, and cleaners who kept everyone fed on Base and the quarters sanitary.

It is important for personnel and staff to understand why, when, and how to wear PPE such as gloves, masks, safety eyewear/visors, and gowns/ coveralls, as well as how to remove and dispose of them properly after use. I explained the basics of COVID-19 to the best of current medical knowledge, which was evolving almost daily. I stressed the critical importance of frequent and thorough hand washing, avoidance of touching eyes, nose and mouth, self-isolation measures, and keeping that all important 2-metre physical distancing as recommended by the NZ Ministry of Health, even when outside.

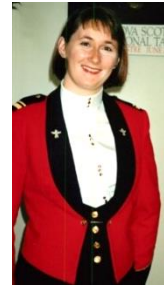
I worked currently closely with the Base Emergency Operations Centre, attending regular briefings and providing advice & guidance as well as providing recommendations as requested. I

was very pleased to see that Base Woodbourne implemented my suggestions for improved hygiene and physical distancing measures in the mess, team briefing and operations room.

I've just begun my current role (2021) at CFB Halifax, as a National Coordinator for Coast Guard Officers which requires me to be on call 24/7. I will cherish that whirlwind of a great learning knowledge year in New Zealand and sharing this professional knowledge

Even on the opposite side of the world, there are more similarities than differences.

NOTE: Theresa Jane (Saulnier) McGuire graduated from the Victoria General Hospital School of Nursing in 1988 and attended the following post-graduate programs: Dalhousie University (Master of Environmental Management), University Laval (Certificate in Community Health Nursing-1991), St. Lawrence College (Diploma of Occupational Health Nursing- 2001), and University of New Brunswick. Following graduation, she worked at the Camp Hill hospital for a short time and enjoyed military nursing in Quebec, England, Ontario and BC. (Theresa in her Army Dress Uniform)



Theresa sailed with the Canadian Coast Guard on summer deployments to the



Arctic as a Ship Nurse for several years. October 2014, just returned from her 4th Alaska trip where she was nurse on several different ships and visited several outposts Bays. She states: "incredible scenery, beautiful local Inuit people and of course polar bears, dolphins and icebergs. I love my nursing career. Not all fun in rough weather with injuries and illnesses though. That's why a nurse is brought along."

After the New Zealand experience, Theresa has joined the CFB at Stadacona, Halifax.