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Older people benefit from new technology

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Media release: Older people benefit from new technology

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Getting help to vulnerable people in the community who need it most after last Tuesday's earthquake was made easier because of a relatively new computerised aged care assessment programme called InterRAI.

The InterRAI programme provides evidence based clinical assessment and care planning tools, developed by a collaborative network of researchers in over 30 countries. The programme is being implemented at every District Health Board as part of a 3-4 year national project. Canterbury has implemented the 'home care' tool, which is primarily focussed on the care of elderly people living at home and has been piloting a 'residential care' tool. The database has two versions running continuously, one in Canterbury and the other in Taranaki.

"This has proven to be of great help in the last week," says Stella Ward, Incident Controller for Vulnerable People. "After the earthquake the team in the North Island was able to work with international support to review the database and to find the older people who may be at greatest risk in the community, then provide a summary for the emergency response team in Christchurch. This enabled the "Vulnerable People" team to prioritise their work and target support and help to those people most at risk. "

International support came from experts overseas like Dr John Hirdes - Chair, Department of Health Studies and Gerontology, University of Waterloo Ontario, but also from a visiting expert, Professor Vince Mor - Chair of the Department of Community Health at the Brown University School of Medicine, Providence, Rhode Island, USA. Professor Mor was coincidentally visiting New Zealand at the time of the earthquake, and was able to provide suggestions about different risk profiles to look for. Valuable assistance also came from Capital and Coast DHB staff.

"The InterRAI assessment programme has been an enormously valuable resource in helping the emergency response teams to provide care to older people who are at high risk," says Nigel Millar. "The unexpected twist was that being part of an international collaboration brought an immediate response from offshore to assist in planning and extracting the data. This could proceed independently without the emergency team being distracted. We're thankful that careful planning by the IT team before the earthquake meant we had a robust, reliable data system that was not interrupted by the earthquake."

"In addition to supporting people at risk in the community we've transferred frail elderly people from rest homes to safe accommodation within Christchurch, but mostly to locations throughout New Zealand," says Nigel. "We received stunning support from receiving DHBs and expert logistical help from the military to move these treasured people. The recent decision to roll out the InterRAI assessment programme to rest home residents will add to our capacity to respond to emergencies in the future and to protect the well being of vulnerable people in care."

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