

GP keen to avoid messaging getting lost in translation

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GP John Cameron says the Medinz system has proved its worth, but it still needs fine-tuning

GPs were unsure if Medinz was real: some GPs didn't trust its queries

Auckland's new Medinz primary care dashboard messaging system still needs fine-tuning, and some doctors still need convincing it's for real, Auckland GP John Cameron says.

Medinz provides a single place for general practices, pharmacists and urgent care clinics to receive communications from DHBs, community labs, regional public health units and PHOs. It was launched in August last year but had its first major test during Auckland's large-scale power outages after a storm in April.

Westmere Medical Centre GP Dr Cameron, who has worked in primary care emergency planning, says the system played an important role in that event, but he says it could do more.

During the disruption, the Medinz system, licensed from health provider database Healthpoint by Auckland and Waitemata DHBs, was able to message GPs, issuing directives and receiving information from them. But many GPs didn't even know they were on Medinz's database via their DHB and ignored or didn't take seriously the messaging during the power outages, Dr Cameron says.

"GPs were unsure if Medinz was real; some GPs didn't trust its queries. They're used to getting messages through their PHO. Some said, 'who the f... wants to know where I am?'"

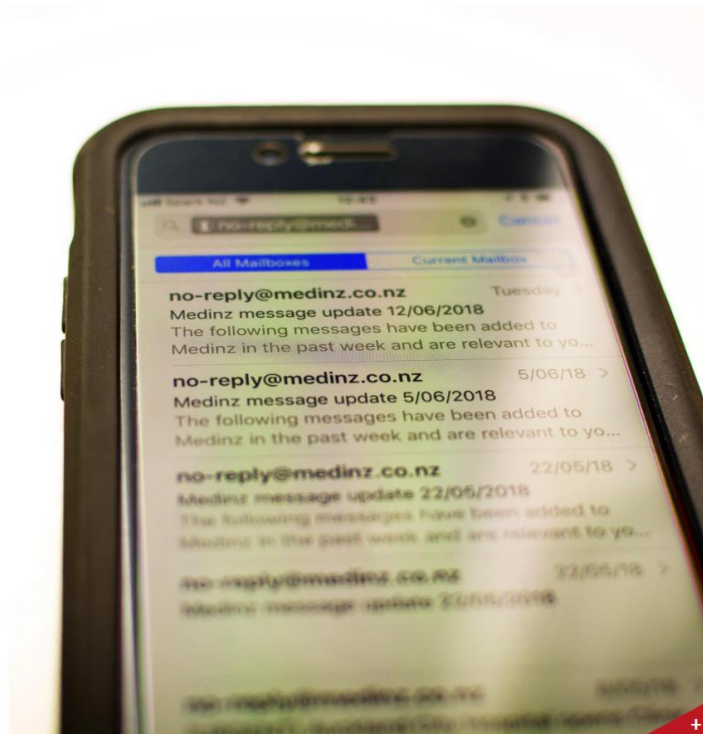
It's hoped Medinz, which took more than five years to get up and running, will eventually reach 6000 Auckland region health staff.

Currently, Medinz reaches more than 1100 Auckland GPs working for 580 different organisations.

Dr Cameron estimates more than 95 per cent of Auckland GPs are now on Medinz's contact list.

To raise GP awareness, Medi-nz has started messaging GPs on a non-critical basis to broadcast the system's existence. Medinz is transmitting weekly, routine, non-urgent information to "socialise" the service with GPs, Dr Cameron says.

His experience managing 2008's H5N1 bird flu outbreak showed information and instructions that were sent through to primary carers needed to be strictly controlled so doctors weren't overwhelmed and confused, he says.



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Communication breakdown

Too much information means doctors are also liable to become blasé about information sent.

April's power outages were a blessing in disguise for the newly blooded Medinz system, Dr Cameron says.

“Because it's new, Medinz is still not well integrated into medical practices' thinking. April was great, we found all these holes in the system.

“It was a good emergency to have, reasonably short-lived and it was not catastrophic.”

One of the benefits of the service is it allows flexible, user-defined, two-way communication with GPs.

Medinz was able to poll GPs via email or text on whether their practices were open and feed that information back through Auckland's emergency management system, so it could direct the public to where medical services were available.

Medinz was able to advise GPs that 12 of Auckland's medical test collection centres were closed and only urgent bloods should be sent for analysis.

The messaging saw test collections drop from 12,000 per week to 3000.

Messages can be grouped geographically or by clinical type, but further work is needed with Auckland PHOs to determine which information gets sent where, Dr Cameron says.

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During the April outages PHOs were still surveying every practice via phone calls.

“They did it in a reasonable time frame, but it’s a hell of a lot more efficient to do it with the press of one button. We’ve got the tool now; we’re working out how to best use it and what’s the most effective, efficient way.”

Counties Manukau DHB is joining Auckland and Waitemata in using Medinz, meaning the system can now be deployed across Auckland. Combined, the DHBs spend about \$60,000 per year on the system for licensing and maintenance.



Auckland’s April storm knocked out power to thousands of people, sending emergency services scrambling to ensure the most vulnerable were cared for

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