

Massive Email Merger for Auckland's Metropolitan Health Boards

Auckland's three metropolitan DHBs have completed what is believed to be one of the biggest email mergers New Zealand has seen.

Some 14,000 email users across Waitemata, Counties Manukau and Auckland DHBs now have access to a single email address book. This means staff who work among the different DHB services – such as Middlemore, Auckland City, Greenlane Clinical Centre, North Shore and Waitakere hospitals - will now be able to access a single email address book wherever they log on.

The three DHB's each had respective plans to upgrade their own Exchange Servers to enable this collaboration. Counties Manukau and Waitemata started the initial email merger, involving around 9000 users in June last year. Following this successful merger, Auckland DHB then upgraded its Exchange Servers to enable a single email address book across the three DHBs taking the number of addresses to 14,000. The single global address book reduces duplication of email names and has greatly benefited inter-hospital electronic communication, say the teams involved in the merger.

The email merger between Counties Manukau and Waitemata DHBs is part of a larger project known as Project Fusion, which also involves the standardisation of several elements of Counties Manukau and Waitemata DHBs' separate computer infrastructures and aims to save the DHBs up to \$800,000 a year by reducing the costs of servicing and maintaining two separate infrastructures. Chief Information Officer for both DHBs, Phil Brimacombe, says in addition to Project Fusion, the DHBs have been collaborating to provide common application systems such as laboratory results reporting. This means that doctors and other clinical staff can view their own patients' information regardless of where they are working in either DHB at the time.

"Electronic systems can help reduce clinical risk by tracking results, identifying who has used the information, what action was taken and whether the results were referred to other clinicians."

Project Fusion is being implemented by healthAlliance, a shared services organisation which was set up in 2001 to provide greater purchasing power and reduce costs in "back office" areas for Counties Manukau and Waitemata DHBs. The merger of IS systems is the final step in the sharing of such services between the DHBs. healthAlliance is estimated to have saved \$5.3 million for the financial year ending June 2003.

healthAlliance IS manager Joanne Bos says Project Fusion has been a massive undertaking, which began roll-out in June last year.

People working in the Waitemata and Counties Manukau DHBs are talking about being 'XP'd' – a reference to the standardisation of all PCs to Windows XP and Microsoft Office 2003. Ms Bos says HP and Microsoft have been key partners in the successful infrastructure 'fusion'.

"These are important steps towards a centrally managed, supported and standardised environment that is accessible from anywhere in the two DHBs. It won't matter where you log in, or what computer you use, it will be the same look and feel," says Ms Bos.

The standardisation is nearing completion at Waitemata DHB, with about 2500 users migrated to the new network. The Fusion team expect to finish the roll-out at Counties Manukau by the end of April.

The merger of systems and networks is in line with Ministry of Health expectations that health boards nationwide should join forces to reduce non-clinical costs and work collaboratively to share systems and information.