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CALL TO ACT NOW TO PREVENT GLOBAL IMPACT ON NEW ZEALAND HEALTH

A communicable diseases nurse says New Zealand needs to consider how forces beyond this country will affect the landscape of its health in the future.

A communicable diseases public health nurse with the Hutt Valley District Health Board, Owen Ashwell, told the Public Health Conference at Auckland University today the history of tuberculosis in this country is a good example of how global forces can affect the well being of New Zealanders.

“One of the impact of colonisation was the introduction of diseases such as tuberculosis to this country and this had a huge impact on the population decline of Māori”.

“Likewise in the future, this country needs to anticipate the impact of things outside its borders on New Zealanders and act now to mediate that impact. For instance, the effect of global warming on and internal conflict inside our Pacific neighbours will affect us. Greater immigration from other Pacific countries means the need for greater disease control”.

Mr Ashwell told the public health delegates, “One way New Zealand can deal with this is through immunisation schemes both in the Pacific Islands and in New Zealand, tuberculosis control strategies, developmental aid, and strategies to alleviate poverty. Another is through more stringent medical screening at the border to include all those entering via family reunification schemes, asylum seekers, and overseas students”.

Returning to the disease of tuberculosis, Mr Ashwell said in many parts of the world, there are critical nursing shortages and increasing rates of tuberculosis disease.

In addition, he told the conference “Since a 1985 World Trade Organisation treaty on intellectual property rights, the price of TB-

fighting pharmaceuticals has risen beyond the reach of many countries.”

“New Zealand has a relatively good nursing to patient ratio and TB treatment is free. That means we are better able to respond to tuberculosis than many other countries who have large nursing shortages”.

Mr Ashwell said World Health Organization figures show a \$30.8m funding shortfall between international plans to get rid of TB and money available to do it. “The most pronounced gaps and the highest rates of TB are in places like south east Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and east Europe, from where many of New Zealand’s immigrants come.”

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