

Lessons From the Commonwealth Bank

Lessons from the past for Today's Pandemic Planners and Officers

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Lessons Learnt

Historical

The Governor of the Commonwealth Bank, Sir Denison Miller, during his business trip to the UK and America in late 1918 had first hand experience of the ravages of influenza and measures being taken to combat influenza. Three hundred and seventy one deaths from influenza were reported on the day of his arrival in Washington alone. Sir Denison Miller in his review to staff reported in Banks Notes which was issued to staff Jan 1919 Vol. No 2 pg 6. To keep the places free from the disease all employees of banks and other institutions were turned out of buildings twice a day while they were aired. He further reported that most of the people serving bars and fruit shops etc wore masks. Windows were taken out of cars to permit thorough ventilation. Theatres were closed, although the elections were on, crowds were not allowed to congregate. It was the same going over across Canada. In some states we had to wear masks ourselves. The people were dying in thousands all through Canada and America. I forget the total, but a great many more were killed by the influenza than by the war. The principle trouble at Auckland was landing the Auckland passengers. The quarantine station was occupied by German Internees. After discharging the passengers we found we were short of coal, then we were short of seamen and engineers, the passengers fired and stoked the ships themselves. Otherwise we would have been in Auckland still. On route from Auckland to Sydney by the "Makara" Australian Health Authorities were advised by wireless that four fresh cases of influenza had broken out on the vessel. The passengers, including Sir Denison Miller, were detained in Quarantine at North Head on 13 December 1918 and he was discharged Saturday 21 December 1918 and presented for duty Monday 23 December 1918.

Acknowledgements

Archival Information

Chris Hurley
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Epidemics appear at intervals and spread with extraordinary rapidity so that in a few weeks an entire continent may be involved.

Sir William Osler 1892

An Invaluable Reference

1918 – Recollection of the epidemic in Philadelphia
Isaac Starr MD
Ann. Intern Med. 2006 145:136-140
Essay First Published 1976

Actions Taken by the Bank - 1919

1. Wearing of Masks by Tellers

10.00am Tuesday 28 Jan 1919
(Much to the amusement of the public)

A few days later a jeering city philosophically donning masks by Government proclamation.

Actions Taken by the Bank - 1919

2. Early Closing of Head Office

22 April 1919 – To relax strain on Bank officers

The State Treasurer gave the necessary permission required under the NSW Act to allow this to be done.



Actions Taken by the Bank - 1919

- 3. Communication with Staff Absent from Duty
- 4. Increased Awareness in Personal Hygiene
- 5. Issue of Plastic Wallets to Customers



Actions Taken by the Bank - 1919

6. Redeployment of Bank Officers

Due to quarantine restrictions and absence due to illness.

Staff on leave or assignment in other States could not return due to the closure of State borders.

Actions Taken by the Bank - 1919

7. Alternate Sourcing of Vital Supplies

Networking with other businesses was the order of the day as trade between the States was stopped except under certain circumstances.

Actions Taken by the Bank - 1919

- 8. Ghosting
- 9. Multi-skilling

Lessons Learnt

Planning

- Proceed in orderly manner with a sense of urgency
- Require a strong commitment from senior management
- Divide tasks into several workstreams
- Small team size is an imperative
- Structured meetings with Business Units on a regular basis

Lessons Learnt

- Identification of critical staff to run business
- Wearing a mask and gloves, particularly in customer facing jobs and to and from work
- Personal hygiene – hand washing, cough etiquette, social distancing, keep fingers away from face and mouth

To achieve the above will require a major change in behaviour

Lessons Learnt

Basic Understanding of the Influenza Virus

- Spread by infected droplets
- Survive on a dry surface for up to 36 hours
- Survive three months in a domestic refrigerator
- Survive for years in the deep freeze

Action

Staff are encouraged to wipe desk, keyboard, computer screen morning and night.

Lessons Learnt

Personal Protective Equipment

- Quantities to be considered
- Placement of stock
- Consider border closures
- Items to be purchased
- Assumptions to be clearly documented
- Reasons why items are not purchased

Lessons Learnt

Personal Protective Equipment

- Volumetric considerations
- Weight (eg 1 litre water weighs 1kg)
- Shelf life
- Storage requirements: temperature, humidity, light, potential hazards eg risk of explosion, bleach and alcohol
- Remote location
- Disposal of out of date stock

Lessons Learnt

Medical Aspects

- Oral rehydration for flu victims
1 tblspn sugar to ½ tspn salt add to a litre of water
The above solution to be used if ORS or similar products are not available
- Sports drinks, soda or juices should not be used – too much sugar and too little sodium

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Lessons Learnt

Medical Aspects

Aspirin Products

- To be removed from the vocabulary immediately – note that Aspirin is sold under many brand names

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Lessons Learnt

Conclusions

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