

# A concerted effort wins the battle

*Food and Environmental Hygiene Department*

*DURING the period that quarantine measures were imposed on the Metropark Hotel Wanchai, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) provided support through cleansing and disinfection of the hotel, and refuse removal.*



Our team comprised two to three health inspectors, and eight to 10 contract workmen. They provided services from early morning until late night. This work was essential to protect the public from human swine influenza (influenza A H1N1) infection.

Like everyone else, we knew little about the new virus and what the effects might be if we fell victim to it. These unknowns posed difficulties in assigning responsibilities and staff mobilisation – how many teams, how many *per* team, what to do, and what not to do.

We faced this new challenge by drawing on our past experience in combating Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and avian influenza. Initially, we could detect signs of fear among team members. If I told you I was not afraid, it would be a lie.

“United, we conquer.” Nothing is truer than this saying. Never before in my career as a health inspector had I worked with so many colleagues of different disciplines – doctors, nurses, cleaners, health inspectors, social workers, colleagues of Auxilliary Medical Service, Civil Aid Service and Hong Kong Police Force.

But, regardless of rank, status and professional expertise, everyone worked towards one goal – to prevent any possible spread of the virus.

In the first few days after the closure of the hotel, the Wanchai District Environmental Hygiene Office probably seemed to be in chaos: people dashing in and out, doors banged, buckets clanked, and names

shouted out loud with a cacophony of telephone rings in the background.

However, there was order amidst the chaos. Orders were given and acted on immediately. No one asked “Why me?” Everyone understood that no job was trivial. Every effort mattered, and every job done was a piece of a jigsaw puzzle, which would read, on completion, the words: “WE WON!”

Not only did everyone take up his or her fair share of work, everyone was prepared to walk an extra mile and help.

There were several occasions on which I heard someone say, in the middle of the night, “You get some sleep over there. I’ll cover for you.” If I told you I was not moved, it would be another lie.

After the quarantine measures ended on the evening of May 8, 2009, the guests moved out of the hotel and so did my colleagues from other departments. We stayed on till late night to collect refuse and clinical waste left in the hotel, and carried out a thorough cleaning and washing of the surrounding areas outside the hotel.

To many, the ‘show’ was over, but we still had a job to do. We returned to the hotel the next day to render support. Some may take our role and services for granted. To me, every member of my team is an unsung hero.

One thing I have learnt from this experience – with teamwork, trust and a shared goal, a battle is half won before it is fought.