



Media Statement

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Subject: Influenza when pregnant means emergency caesarean

Kim Neho watches her seven-month-old twins rolling around the floor trying to sit upright in their Kaitaia home and, as she does every day, counts her lucky stars she is still around to witness these milestone moments.

Rewind seven months and she was lying in a coma at death's door, her body ravaged by influenza and a range of other complications, surrounded by her husband, three kids and, nuzzling into their mother, her newborn twins, who she was yet to meet.

With a surprise pregnancy, Kim and husband Robert learnt their family of five would be expanding to seven with fraternal twins. After a straight-forward pregnancy, it was during week 35 when she caught the flu that things began to go down-hill.

“Nothing seemed too out of the ordinary. I don't get sick often but this seemed nothing different to any other time.”

Abdominal pain and extreme shortness of breath followed and, at Whangarei Hospital, after fluids, oxygen and attempts to apply special ventilation via a mask were unsuccessful, it was decided to deliver the babies in a bid to manage Kim's now-critical state.

The last thing Kim, 32, remembers is lying in theatre wearing a mask and having a panic attack while surrounded by medical staff poking and prodding her.

After she underwent an emergency caesarean, Robert was informed that their two healthy boys – (later named) Thomas, 3.1kg, and Grayson, 2.8kg – had been delivered safely and were now in SCBU.

“At this point everything was still normal,” recalls Robert. “They said Kim was back in her room in ICU with a breathing tube down her lungs and I could go and see her. But by the time I got back to ICU she had been put into an induced coma to assist with her breathing. It was meant to be only for 48 hours.”

Kim was in the coma for 17 days, her breathing assisted with a ventilator and heavy sedation was used to allow it to be tolerated.

From that point, Kim's health plummeted. Conventional ventilation became impossible, as inflammation, due to the influenza, caused the lungs to fail and become stiff. While specialists tried other tactics and considered a transfer to Auckland Hospital to be put on a



heart lung machine as a last resort, a terrified but brave Robert, who had been told his wife had only a 20 per cent chance of survival, tried to hold it together for the kids.

While Kim was in the coma, her other three children met their two new siblings and, after Robert sat them down to explain what was happening, were shocked to see their mum.

The twins stayed in SCBU for around ten days before Kim's mum took them back to her home in Kaitaia to look after them.

While Kim was monitored around the clock, a range of complications occurred, including a return to the operating theatre when the caesarean wound fell apart due to poor healing in critical illness, and air pockets in the lung bursting, requiring tubes to be placed through the chest.

Meanwhile, an oblivious Kim, high on morphine, was in a world of her own seeing people on the other side and having adventures involving doctors stealing babies and people getting shot.

Finally, after nearly 20 days, Kim's breathing was adequate to reduce the sedation to low enough levels to allow memories to return. When she was coherent enough to learn of her ordeal she was shocked.

"I went in to have the babies and came out of a coma."

It was towards the end of her stay, results turned up influenza.

"I have no idea how I caught it – I didn't go anywhere as I was too big."

Kim says it didn't occur to her to have the flu vaccination but would now recommend it to pregnant women, who are more susceptible to it and its adverse effects.

The twins were one month old when she met them, although they had already spent time lying across her chest while she was in a coma.

"It was exciting meeting them and so good to see the kids, although Lara wouldn't come near me and fair enough – I had a pipe sticking out of my chest."

Today, Kim feels sad when she thinks about what her husband and kids – Jordan, 12, Chavelle, now eight, and Lara, now four - endured.

"I lost 17 days of our lives. I missed everything that every mother gets to have," says an emotional Kim.

"This (ordeal) has made a lot of changes in everyone's attitudes. Our boy has grown up so much. The kids have seen a lot of stuff they should never have had to see."

She has almost made a full recovery and lives the life of a typical busy mum: She gets up at 6.30am and makes the kid's breakfast and lunch, the older two head down the drive to catch



the school bus, the twins have a feed and a nappy change before they go back to bed. Then she deals with Lara and the house cleaning and copious amounts of washing. They will usually head into town or playgroup before the kids return home from school, Robert from work before the dinner, showers, bottles, nappies and bed routine.

“I’m loving it. I’m running around with the kids and just enjoying life. Everything is back to normal.

“I do everything most mothers do. I don’t sit around hoping someone will do it for me – I didn’t get this far by not giving everything a go and pushing myself,” says Kim, who still fits in time to exercise, ride horses and fish. “I know my limits and I keep pushing them that little bit further every day.

“The twins are two complete different boys. Both are really happy and playful. Grayson is more the trouble-maker who loves his food and Thomas is the big softie who is just happy to sit there and talk to you all day.

“The kids all help with feeding and nappy changing - even Lara will change them if the nappies are just wet,” she laughs fondly, gazing at her youngest daughter who is obsessed with dolphins, horses, her cat Dora and dog Shag.

These are all traits which have developed over recent months – developments Kim is only too aware she could easily have missed, along with Jordan’s love of motorbikes and hunting and Chavelle’s horse riding and netball.

“It hits me at Christmas and birthdays that I could have missed life as it is today. It was our seven-year wedding anniversary in March and it occurred to me that, if I didn’t make it, Robert would have had it without me.

“Every single day when I look at them I’m reminded of how lucky I am. Every day is a good day for me because I’m getting better, I get to see my kids grow and I go to the boys’ cots every morning and there’s always a huge smile from ear to ear when I look in their beds. I get to cuddle up with Lara and enjoy her cheeky attitude and laugh and have Jordan tease me because he’s taller than me and witness Chavelle playing mother duck so, yes, I count my lucky stars every day.”

The flu vaccine is free for pregnant woman. This can be obtained from the GP or antenatal clinic.