



In the cockpit: Dr Dave Baldwin and Flying Doctor Service staff member Alice Baker in the aircraft undergoing conversion to a medical facility. Photo: ROBERT CHARLES

New life for grounded bandit

Former Ansett airliner ZK REV is about to embark on a new mission, but without leaving the ground.

It now displays the insignia of the Bulls Flying Doctor Service and is destined to become a hyperbaric chamber used to simulate hypoxia.

If a window should blow out at 30,000 feet, the sudden oxygen loss could be catastrophic said Dr Dave Baldwin, head of the Flying Doctor Service yesterday.

"It is the emergency pilots fear."

The 20-seater Bandeirante twin-engined turboprop aircraft was obtained by Massey University with the intention of converting it to a flight simulator for its pilot training



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students.

However, the project never got off the ground, so to speak, and after nearly 10 years in storage the aircraft was acquired by the Bulls Flying Doctor Service.

"We have a strong relationship with Massey," said Dr Baldwin, known almost universally in aviation

circles as "Doctor Dave".

He flies around the country on regular circuits examining pilots for their regular aviation medicals and has written widely and lectured on medical concerns for pilots.

He also operates the Bulls Medical Centre which was joined recently by Dr Paul Tervit, who used to run the naval hyperbaric chamber at Devonport.

The Bandeirante has been chocked up beside the Flying Doctor hangar at Palmerston North International Airport and is now being fitted out for its new assignment. It will not be a true "chamber", but will use face masks and gas

delusional techniques to simulate the effects of hypoxia, Dr Baldwin said.

Initially, it will be used as a "smoko room" which will free up a room for his son Marc Baldwin to run helicopter training classes.

Getting the former airliner set up has taken about four months so far. It has been given a snappy new coat of exterior paint and is being fitted out inside for its new role.

Donations of instruments and other parts are helping to restore the cockpit to something like its original condition, but Dr Baldwin said the process from Smoko Room to medical facility was likely to be slow.