

Welcome to the ninth issue of the New Zealand Medical Student Journal (NZMSJ). It is now over five years since our first issue was published, and our continued success is a testament to the unique qualities of New Zealand medical students. One such quality is an inspiring 'can-do' attitude – in fact, to our knowledge we are one of only two entirely student-led journals in the world to publish original peer-reviewed research. We are delighted to continue to be able to provide a forum for this country's passionate medical students to publish their own original research and express their views on important issues.

New Zealand medical students are currently the object of several government-based schemes such as Voluntary Bonding and a significant increase in medical students' numbers over the coming years. We would like to take this opportunity to encourage your comments and opinions on these important topics because it is only through discussion and awareness that we can play a part in improving the health care system in New Zealand. In addition to addressing issues specific to our country, we are enthusiastic about publishing articles on global health and have regularly done so in the past. The 18th International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War (IPPNW) World Congress was held last year in Delhi, India and in this issue you will find a full report by medical student attendees Rachael Cowie, Andrew Wainwright and Rosemary Wyber.

Medical students are often faced with situations that they may not necessarily feel prepared for. Especially at the start of the clinical years, students are striving to increase their biomedical knowledge of disease as well as become proficient in the many technical aspects of medical care. However, alongside these challenges are ethical issues that many students will never have had to previously deal with in their lives. Moral grey areas are everywhere in Medicine but there is no simple way for us, as medical students, to learn how to decide what is the 'right thing to do'. One important aspect in developing ethical knowledge is to write about difficult issues and read widely on what others have to say. In this issue of NZMSJ, the ethical considerations around end of life decisions are explored in J. Charmaine Chan's thought-provoking article, "To treat, or not to treat?".

We would like to thank Professor Peter Crampton, Dean of the Wellington School of Medicine, for not only his kind sponsorship of this issue's Dean's Writing Prize, but also his input into the selection of the winning article: "Sarcopenic Obesity with Polypharmacy is Associated with Gait and Balance Disturbances in Older Adults", by Lauren Tarawhiti who has completed her BPhEd in Clinical Exercise Prescription from the University of Otago's School of Physical Education.

We are very proud to be able to celebrate the hard work of New Zealand medical students. As well as keeping up with a demanding academic degree programme, many students also find time to conduct original research, and we are excited to be able to publish this work and give it the recognition it deserves. Congratulations must go to all authors represented in this issue: being published is an admirable achievement that we hope you all feel proud of. We certainly look forward to receiving such excellent submissions in the future.

The NZMSJ Executive.

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## Bridging the Gap: Strategies to promote the recruitment and retention of Pacific Islanders into the health professions

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given the difficulties involved in their recruitment into the health systems of many countries. New Zealand is no exception and the problem of increasing the participation of Maori and Pacific people in the health and disability workforce is exercising the minds of government and educational institutions alike.<sup>7</sup>

Pacific Islanders make up 6.9% of the New Zealand population, a proportion that is predicted to increase rapidly.<sup>8</sup> At present, however, only 1.3% of doctors, 2.8% of nurses, 0.5% of dentists, 0.2% of pharmacists, 0.7% of physiotherapists and 1.3% of medical laboratory scientists are Pacific Islanders.<sup>9</sup> If these numbers could be increased then some of the health disparities noted in New Zealand between Pacific people and other groups might be reduced.<sup>10</sup>

There is currently no system to collect comprehensive data about Pacific students enrolled in all tertiary health professional programmes in New Zealand. However, a survey of Otago and Auckland medical students in 2001 revealed that 4.3% were of Pacific descent.<sup>11</sup> More recently, a review conducted in 2006 of Pacific students enrolled at the University of Otago showed that 25 were enrolled for medicine (2% of all medical students), 5 for dentistry (1.8%), 18 for pharmacy (4.8%), 4 for physiotherapy (1%) and 3 for medical laboratory science (3.1%).<sup>12</sup>

Why are these numbers so much lower than equivalent numbers in the population? What, if anything, are the barriers to recruitment of Pacific people into the health professions? Four major factors, structural, systemic, organizational and individual, were identified in 2008 as barriers to the recruitment of Maori into the health and disability workforce.<sup>7</sup> Does a similar set of barriers exist for Pacific people? Do the motivators for career choice for Pacific students in particular differ from those of other health science students in general?<sup>13</sup>

### Aims of this study

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that might hinder and/or contribute towards recruitment of Pacific people into the health professions in New Zealand. The investigation was confined for logistical reasons to Pacific Island students enrolled in the health professional programmes at the University of Otago and the University of Auckland.

### METHOD

An anonymised, self-completed questionnaire was developed and piloted on non-Pacific students with some minor changes being made prior to administration to the target group. The questionnaire requested demographic information, reasons affecting career choice, barriers and support systems and other associated factors. Ethical approval for the survey was obtained from the University of Otago Ethics Committee.

### Erratum

Following from the article published by him in Issue 8 of the Journal, Dr Warwick Bagg (Senior Lecturer, University of Auckland) would like to acknowledge the many University of Auckland and Northland stakeholders who participated in the design and implementation of the Northland Regional-Rural Programme, Pūkawakawa.

Unfortunately due to limitations of the publishing software, macrons that should have been printed were omitted.

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### ABSTRACT

**Aims:** To describe the characteristics of Pacific students enrolled in health professional courses at the University of Otago and the University of Auckland, and to identify factors which influence their career choices.

**Methods:** An online survey was designed and offered to Pacific Island students enrolled in health professional courses at the University of Otago and the University of Auckland. The questionnaire requested demographic information, motivation for choosing a career in health, barriers and support systems utilised by Pacific students.

**Results:** The majority (68%) of the survey respondents gained entry after a first year health sciences course. Half of the survey respondents were born in New Zealand; and 28% were born in one of the Pacific Islands. Approximately two thirds of students were bilingual and half had attended a high-decile ranking secondary school in New Zealand. Although most of their parents had some post-secondary education, very few were health professionals. The majority of the respondents stated they wished to work to improve the health of the New Zealand Pacific community and assist in developing the health infrastructure of Pacific Island nations.

**Conclusions:** Differences between the study and general health professional student populations were identified, as were differences between the Pacific student population and general New Zealand Pacific population, thus indicating strategies that might be employed to increase recruitment of Pacific people into the health professions.

### INTRODUCTION

When people seek health care they will, whenever possible, seek assistance from those professionals with whom they can identify most readily. This is especially the case for those patients who belong to a minority group in any given population, whether these are Native, African or Hispanic Americans living in the United States<sup>1-4</sup> or Maori and Pacific people living in New Zealand.<sup>5, 6</sup> However, such professionals may be hard to find