

FEATURES ARTICLE

Equity at the table: Te Oranga and the push for Māori representation

Chayce Glass



In recent years there has been a growing push to ensure the Māori medical student voice is well represented. Te Oranga has been at the forefront of this movement, working with its members and other medical student organisations to ensure this is achieved. Our challenge now is to ensure that those who occupy these seats we have worked to create

at the table have a voice that is heard and respected.

Te Oranga, the peak national organisation for Māori medical students, has been in existence since 1998. It exists primarily to promote and protect the collective interests of Māori who study medicine throughout Aotearoa. To achieve this, Te Oranga is run by an elected executive made up of representatives from all reaches of the country. These representatives build policy, advocate on issues, and organise events that promote whakawhanaungatanga between Māori medical students. In essence, Te Oranga achieves a by Māori, for Māori approach aimed at protecting and enhancing a unique group of doctors-in-training who are part of the solution to reducing health inequities faced by Māori throughout Aotearoa.

To achieve this, Te Oranga has sought to ensure it is well represented throughout the medical student space to provide a voice for Māori medical students wherever appropriate. An important part of this has been in the development of quality relationships with other medical student associations.

The best example of this is the relationship between Te Oranga and the New Zealand Medical Students' Association (NZMSA). In 2012, both parties worked to build the Māngai NZMSA role. A shared executive member, the Māngai NZMSA helps to maintain effective communication between both parties and ensure a voice is present for Māori medical students at the decision-making table of the NZMSA. The Māngai NZMSA has full voting rights, and Te Oranga is also an essential voter at NZMSA annual general meetings and elections. Further to this, 2017 saw both parties sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). Based upon Treaty of Waitangi principles of Partnership, Participation, and Protection, the MoU has seen:

- A Treaty-based partnership where important kaupapa have been worked on by both organisations (for example the campaign to increase Equivalent Full-Time Student (EFTS) measurements for medical students accessing government-funded student loans and allowances)
- A focus on ensuring equitable representation of Māori attending important NZMSA events
- An increase in the inclusion of Te Ao Māori in the decision making and processes of the NZMSA.

While no formal evaluation of the above partnership has been conducted to date, this author believes that it is a shining example within medical associations of how Māori and non-Māori organisations can work together to enhance the interests of Māori, and promote the collective interests of the students they serve.

Regionally, Te Oranga has supported Māori representation within medical students' associations. The Wellington Health Professional Students Association has a Te Oranga representative appointed to its council. Dunedin-based Māori medical students now elect a Te Ao Māori representative to the Otago University Medical Students Association. Auckland students have their own Māngai Māori within the ranks of the executive of the Auckland University Medical Students Associations. Very soon our whānau in Christchurch will have a voice within the Christchurch Medical Students Association (CMSA) with the creation of the Te Whirika role and the inclusion of the Te Oranga Ōtautahi Tuakana, both within the CMSA executive.

These are great examples of medical students creating a space for Māori peers to engage in the activities and administration of medical student organisations throughout the country. It is overwhelmingly positive that medical students are doing this of our own volition and becoming a leading example of ensuring our leadership roles are representative of all students.

With Māori medical students now being given a space at the table of many organisations, our next challenge must be to ensure that this space is also given a voice. It is one thing for us to have "the Māori representative" and another to allow that representative to be heard. For this, we must again turn back to equity and shift our focus from not only diversity, but inclusion as well.

This author offers the following advice:

- Māori never ceded sovereignty and should therefore always be allowed to have their own voice and self-determination.
- Acknowledge that Māori students fulfilling these roles are there to represent Māori medical students and not the whole of Te Ao Māori (the Māori world).
- Understand that Māori people and culture are not homogenous and vary between iwi, hapū, whānau and individuals.
- The Māori representative is not there to satisfy the need for "culture" within an organisation, but to promote the opinions and views of Māori medical students.
- One Māori at the table is not enough and effective change will require more Māori voices.
- Finding ways to support kaupapa Māori within our space as medical students will guide us in how to do so once we are doctors and can make change within the health system.
- Māori should not be isolated to just Māori-specific roles, but encouraged to be leaders wherever they wish.
- Work together, debate each other, and understand differences.

Te Oranga will be there to lead and support this new challenge we face. However, one organisation cannot do this alone. Medical students all need to share this challenge and actively explore ways in which we can rise to this. This will help us create medical schools that are more inclusive of the Māori world. We can hope this will help us work towards effective change that will reduce Māori health inequities once we are graduated and take our steps into the world of practising doctors.

About the author

› Chayce Glass is the Tumuaki of Te Oranga and a Trainee Intern at University of Otago, Wellington. He has been the Tumuaki of Te Oranga since December 2016, driving Te Oranga to become much more recognised across the national stage. His passion is in supporting Māori medical students in achieving excellence within academic, cultural and leadership fields, and pushing the medical schools to ensure they are an excellent environment for things Māori. Chayce will graduate at the end of this year, officially ending his role as Tumuaki after 3 years of service.

Acknowledgements

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