

# PRIDoC: Pacific Region Indigenous Doctors Congress



## Julia Wilson

BMedSc(Hons) Student  
Dunedin School of Medicine  
University of Otago

## John Hay

Fourth Year Medical Student  
Christchurch School of Medicine  
University of Otago

Julia is of Te Arawa descent. She completed her third year of medicine in 2006 and is currently studying towards a BMedSc(Hons) in Pathology.

John is from Te Atiawa descent. He has an interest in indigenous health in particular in health care of the elderly.

## What is PRIDoC?

PRIDoC is the Pacific Region Indigenous Doctors Congress, a conference held every two years, with the previous two meetings being held in Hawaii and Cairns (Australia). In 2006 the conference was hosted by Te Ohu Rata o Aotearoa (Te ORA - the Maori medical practitioners association) and held in Rotorua.

The attending doctors and medical students came from a number of countries, including New Zealand, Australia and the Torres Strait, Taiwan, mainland America and Hawaii, and Canada. As well as Te ORA, the doctors associations involved in PRIDoC include the Australian Indigenous Doctors association (AIDA), the Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP), Ahahui o na Kauka (the association of Native Hawaiian Physicians), the Pacific Basin Medical Association (PBMA) and the Native Physicians Association of Canada.

The notion behind PRIDoC is that indigenous populations throughout the world, which have undergone colonisation, have similar health problems



Students outside Tunohopu Marae

and needs. When we come together there is the opportunity to focus our attention on those needs. However, PRIDoC is more than just a medical conference; it also provides opportunities for the associations involved to learn from and support each other.

## Wednesday/Day 1

We arrived in Rotorua at different times and from different directions, with many students driving in and others flying. For those that had never been to Rotorua before, the hot springs, geysers and mud pools were all on the must see list. With all this geothermal activity, Rotorua has a thriving tourism industry, much of which is run by Te Arawa, the local iwi (tribe) and our hosts for the week.

The conference started with a Powhiri (formal welcome) at Tamatekapua marae. Te ORA organised for small groups of Maori students to wait at the hotels and answer any questions congress delegates may have had about marae protocol. We taught delegates to hongī (to press noses, a traditional Maori greeting), with some occasional, accidental lipstick exchange. This was the first of many opportunities to meet international delegates and learn about their home countries from an indigenous perspective.

The marae was overflowing during the Powhiri, a testament to the enthusiasm and spirit of the people attending. Although it got very hot inside, most delegates were glad to have attended as experiencing the culture of the host nation is an important part of the conference.

Hangi (a type of traditional meal) was provided for dinner, with more than enough for everyone - another Maori tradition for our delegates. The hangi in Rotorua was different to most hangi as the natural hot water and steam eliminated the need to bury the food with hot rocks. This meant that it didn't have the smoky flavour many of us are used to, though no one was complaining.

After this, the students went down the road to Tunohopu marae, where we were all staying for the week. For those who have never stayed at a marae before, it is most similar to a giant sleep over, with everyone bringing their own sleeping bags or bedding and the marae providing the mattresses and kai (food). We had around 50 people staying on the marae for the conference, mainly Maori students, though there were also a few people from other countries. A special feature of this marae was under floor heating in the bathroom, presumably via a redirected natural hot water spring.

## Thursday/Day 2 - Indigenous Medical Workforce

Thursday saw the start of the presentations, and the first presentation for the day was from Professor Mason Durie about indigenous resilience. This was an alternative perspective on indigenous peoples, presenting them not as weak races that have suffered from colonisation, but resilient races that have survived colonisation and are now growing stronger. For those of



us that had not heard this perspective before, this was an eye opening and inspiring presentation.

Throughout the rest of the day, there were presentations from several different countries discussing how to increase the numbers of indigenous medical students, one of the many health issues we share. Most indicated a need to target students before they start university and a need to ensure indigenous students can retain their cultural connections while training. The idea of creating a dedicated indigenous medical school was raised. This is likely to become an increasingly attractive idea as existing medical schools are stretched to their limits. It would reduce, perhaps eliminate, the accusations indigenous students face that they have taken a non-indigenous students place, and it would allow a culturally safe and supportive environment, particularly for indigenous students with English as a second language.

The Cultural Events Night was held in the evening, one of the highlights of the conference. There were outstanding performances from everyone (particularly AIDA), a prayer giving thanks for everything, and many successful protests at the suggestion we leave without having seen a performance from Hawaii. The only complaint was that the night wasn't long enough!

### Friday/Day 3 - Indigenous Health Research

The most memorable part of Friday's presentations was during Moana Jackson's presentation, when a member of the audience suggested that we follow-up the "Warrior gene" research by looking for the "Ignorant racist gene". Moana's presentation also talked about knowing where the thought began, such as the use of "us" and "them" to accuse Maori. He noted that "needs usually arise because rights have been breached".

Other presentations included research on health inequalities and how these are presented in the media. There was also a discussion of what the Women's Health Initiative means for Native American women, and a description of Ho'oponopono, a traditional Hawaiian way of dealing with family issues.

On our only free night the students decided to retreat to the Waitapu

#### Box 1 Waiata

E piata ana nga whetu i te rangi  
He tohu arahi e  
I hoesa mai ra o tatou tipuna e

Koira te timatanga he iwi rangatira  
I whakapuawai e  
Kia mataara, whai whakaaro  
Whakamarama e

#### Translation

Our ancestors great migration was guided by the stars in the sky.  
From this, a beautiful people blossomed. Stay focussed and always  
follow the thoughts back/know where we originated. Enlightenment  
will prevail

Written by: Diana Rangihuna (Ngati Porou), Lily Fraser (Kai Tahu) and  
Marama Wepa (Ngati Kahungunu).

Bridge pool, a natural hot spring. We had a few waiata (songs), a few ales and very few injuries (pretty good considering how much boiling mud was in the area). Everyone that attended had a great night. While there, bathing under the stars, a few creative folk decided to compose a waiata (box 1) complete with actions. We decided to make it a PRIDoC tradition for the students to try and write a new song in the language of the hosts.

### Saturday/Day 4 - Indigenous Health Services

The final day of presentations started with a talk about traditional healing by aboriginal Australians. This presentation stood out from the many others on traditional healing because the healers spoke in their native language. The two men spoke through a translator about how they became healers, the importance of traditional healing, and what they are doing to continue the tradition. It was a privilege to witness a culture so untouched by western society.

As the day went on, there were more presentations about traditional healing, as well as indigenous health care, cancer treatment, and inequalities.

Mental health was also clearly on the agenda, with a summary of the Maori data from the New Zealand Mental Health Survey and a talk about cultural identity issues among Maori children and adolescents.

In the evening we had the Congress Dinner. It was decided that we would unveil our new waiata here, in front of all our mentors! We had a fantastic number of students get up, many from overseas who may have never done waiata before. The performance went well, with only one hitch (when there was some disagreement about what the words were), not bad given that it was only written the day before.

### Sunday/Day 5

The final day saw everyone gather poolside at the Millennium Hotel for Poroporoaki (farewell). Here the various nations attending exchanged gifts and awards were given out to various organisers and presenters. All of the students received numerous small gifts from bags of salt to diaries.

### Conclusion

The week of PRIDoC was a fantastic time, which we will all cherish for years to come. The most valuable part was meeting new people and knowing that, half way round the world, there are other indigenous doctors/medical students struggling with so many of the same issues that we struggle with as Maori. The whole event was a time of bonding, a spiritual gathering to keep the fire burning with passion and commitment. This was an essential reminder that we are not alone, something we need at least once every two years.

For more information about the 2006 PRIDoC go to  
[www.conference.co.nz/pridoc2006](http://www.conference.co.nz/pridoc2006)

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