

Training needs of Maori medical students

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Introduction

This reports on two studentship projects undertaken over the summer of 1999-2000 for Te Ohu Rata o Aotearoa (Te Ora / the Maori Medical Practitioners Association). The aim of these projects was to collate information on the training and development needs of Maori medical students.

Maori medical students who were currently enrolled at the Auckland School of Medicine or at the Otago University Medical School were given the opportunity to respond to the questionnaire

The questionnaire contained a list of elements grouped into four areas; academic, career development, personal qualities and cultural factors. Students were asked to rate these elements on a scale of 1 to 6 for their importance in relation to achievement at medical school. Open questions were also used exploring training needs, academic assistance, financial and other important issues facing Maori medical students.

Results

42 of the 88 questionnaires were completed and returned (48%). Analysis of the completed questionnaires

showed clear preferences from students about important factors in their lives in relation achievement at Medical School.

Turning up to lectures and laboratory sessions, support from other Maori students, effective study skills and use of tutorials were identified as important academic elements whereas support from medical and Maori staff was seen to be unimportant. The ability of Maori medical students to identify as a group and exposure to Maori health professionals were seen as important to career development far over and above standard career advice. Knowledge of te reo and tikanga Maori were the primary cultural issues and religious issues were seen to be of little importance

In the open ended questions the following topics were developed.

Te reo classes. Almost all the students indicated that te reo Maori was a training need. Clearly students feel te reo Maori will support their future role as a Maori doctor. A number of Auckland students noted that Ataarangi as being a good opportunity for learning te reo Maori. These classes have been held regularly at Auckland medical school for the last 4 years. Auckland students also remarked on the removal of the Maori option paper from the second year curriculum, with dismay. These students were concerned that they could not longer learn about te reo Maori and Maori health issues as part of the course.

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Tikanga/cultural understanding. Comments on tikanga (cultural protocols and culturally appropriate

behaviors) and other aspects of the Maori culture were also very common. Many students commented on how important it is to have an understanding of tikanga, in particular the tikanga of iwi other than their own. They believed that this knowledge was needed for them to work more effectively with Maori patients. Most students felt that they had at least a basic understanding of tikanga in normal settings (e.g. on the marae), but comments were made on needing training of particular tikanga important within medical settings (e.g. during a medical consultation).

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Communication skills. Another recurring theme in the responses was communication skills. These responses do not essentially relate to knowledge of te reo Maori, but rather were about having the ability to adequately portray health messages to Maori or Pakeha patients in either Maori or English. To accomplish this, students felt they needed good skills in both languages. Students felt that for particular situations in the future with Maori patients, they needed the skills to be able to effectively express health concerns to Maori and give advice on lifestyle changes.

Tutorials. There were two types of tutorials mentioned by students in these two questions. There were the tutorials that were held by lecturer/tutors, which were assessed as being satisfactory although the tutorials were sometimes too large and impersonal. Tutorials were also held by senior Maori students and many students commented that these were the better of the two types of tutorial and they were highly valued. It was suggested that there might be a need for someone to co-ordinate and monitor the success of these student-run tutorials.

Study groups. Study groups are another common form of academic assistance that are utilised by Maori students. Students felt that it was a good tool for studying (especially closer to exam times) but commented that the students were pressed for time to organize and attend these groups and that not all students are as strong as each other in all subjects.

Peer support from Maori medical students. The support of fellow Maori medical students was mentioned most often and also frequently the most important. It was felt to be a support system for social, academic, and emotional support, as well as an avenue for students to strengthen their cultural base.

Whanau. For most of the students, whanau was seen as an essential support system, and although they usually had little knowledge of the course, they were the best at the more practical forms of support such as financial, emotional and spiritual support. For a lot of students obtaining this form of support can be quite difficult because their parents are not in the same city. Because of this the Maori medical student peers have become, to a number of students, a second family.

Costs. Students expressed two related opinions about the impact of course fees. The first was that the course fee created difficulties with living costs and this in turn compromised study time from the additional part time work needed to supplement incomes. The second was that course fees should be added to the "student loan and forgot about it" in order to get on with graduating.

Discussion

This survey confirms the results of similar previous work. A recent survey of Te ORA members¹ by Jansen & Jansen highlighted the personal qualities of commitment and perseverance that are required of all medical students, together with the support of Maori peers and family. Both surveys confirm the results of a Dayll Jensen and Jules Older survey of 14 Maori doctors undertaken in 1977. Our survey has highlighted the importance that Maori medical students place on knowledge of tikanga and te reo Maori alongside the the needs analysis undertaken by Keri Lawson-Te Aho, where being culturally confident is increasingly voiced as being of importance by Maori doctors.

Te Ohu Rata o Aotearoa (the Maori Medical Practitioners Association / Te ORA) will use the results of this work to inform decisions about support for student activities. In the year 2000 this has included support for peer meetings, the inclusion of students in Te ORA meetings, the annual general meeting, conferences, the Maori GP peer group, and additional studentships. Additional

activities for 2001 may include support or advocacy for language classes and tikanga wananga.

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References

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- 2 Older J. *The Pakeha Papers*, J McIndoe, Dunedin, 1978
- 3 Lawson-Te Aho K. *Report to the CTA on Training needs of Maori health professionals*, Clinical Training Agency, 1997.