

FEATURES ARTICLE

Pacific Island Health Professional Students Association (PIHPSA): Who we are and the heart behind what we do

Fuatino Heath



It is an honour to be included in the NZMSJ; this is a reflection of the progression of and within Medicine that we are fortunate enough to be right in the middle of. I am proud to be part of an association that promotes the growth and evolution of Pacific Health in Aotearoa. We recognise the many setbacks incorporated in our Health system as well as the socioeconomic factors that goes against minority groups. We chose to uplift members by encouraging unity among our Pacific peers to evoke change. This feature article is just a small reflection of who PIHPSA is and what we stand for. Ultimately, our heart is for Our People. We are a relatively young association of 13 years, with much to learn. But our strength continues to build and our future holds great promise. Watch this space!



Taloha ni and warm Pacific greetings,

Ko toku ingoa ko Fuatino Heath. Ko oku matua ko Peter ma Nau-mati. Ko toku tamana e hau mai Samoa. Ko toku matua e hau mai Tokelau. Ko au e aoga faka fomai i te University i Otago, kua katoa nei te tolu tauhaga. Ko au hiahia i taku galuega. Ko au ko he teine Pahefika! My name is Fuatino Heath and I am blessed to be the daughter of Peter and Mardi Heath. I am a proud Samoan-Kiwi from dad's side and a proud Tokelauan from mum's side. I am currently in my third year of Medicine at the University of Otago after recently completing my Bachelor of Science, majoring in Anatomy. I love what I do and most importantly, I am proud to be a Pacific woman!

From its origins, the Pacific Islands Health Professional Student Association (PIHPSA) was founded on the initiative to bring young Pacific students together, to create a space where we, as students, could strengthen our Pacific identity, connect with our peers, and find solutions to better Pacific Health. With time, PIHPSA's focus has evolved to include academic, cultural, and social support to our Pacific and non-Pacific students who are passionate about the fruition of Pacific Health.

Networking is a key focus in PIHPSA with the purpose of preparing all students in their transition from a health professional programme, into the workforce. We endeavour to shed light on what is ahead through the recruitment of alumni, experienced staff, and health professionals as mentors. We also hold monthly dinners that promote

the union of students in a relaxed environment. Here, speakers can breathe life into our members and provide insight into what to expect once leaving the sheltered precincts that are often associated with university. Because the real world can be somewhat daunting, the concept of growing up is often met with resistance or fear. In PIHPSA, we do our best to make sense of this. We recognise that the majority of Pacific students come to university with a purpose and mindset to serve their people. While we do aim to prepare students for what is to come, we also focus on the present time. PIHPSA celebrates all aspects of an individual's identity, reinforcing the path students have chosen for their future, while serving as an anchor to remind students of why they have chosen this journey. This enriches the student experience and sets up a platform for leadership among our community.



Sunday service at Fono 2019

In May, we held our annual PIHPSA Fono, a weekend of team bonding, fellowship, and seminars. The programme finished with a church service as a reflection and reminder of why we had all gathered. This year's theme was We the Voyagers; the Pacific Journey. We wanted to highlight some of the issues we face as young Pacific people in the professional setting and to learn how to embrace the power that our own individuality brings. Many students felt that they could resonate with the discussion of what it feels like to have to walk between two worlds, a common reality for Pacific people in a westernised clinical context. Society rarely challenges the fact that the teaching and curriculum, set by centuries of tradition, may not be what is really best for all of our patients. As Pasifika students navigating through our education and professional journey, we can testify to this. We can understand how the gaps in medical literature, teaching and practicality act as barriers that hinder the provision of the best service to our people. We recognise the debilitating health inequities.

We are no strangers to the shortcomings in our health system. By uniting Pacific students across all health professional courses, we encourage solidarity among the next line of leaders for Pacific Health. By providing a safe space for our students at PIHPSA, we spark conversations on what must be done in order to change the system that fails to cater to our people. Until the system can account for the gaps in our teaching curriculums, who can better serve our people than our people? Or at least, those with a heart for our people.



Keynote address by Falefatu Enari at Fono 2019

Among many highlights of the Fono, it was noted that the students were very moved by the alumni panel, where several of our alumni shared their own triumphs, struggles, and testimonies in their professional course. They were raw and explained their experiences in a way that resonated with our students. For example, the expectations from internal and external sources, balancing relationships while studying, life with kids in a professional setting, and much more. The keynote speaker for our Fono, Falefatu Enari, Principal/Tamā of Pacific Advancement Senior School (PASS), shared how we as young Pacific people must always remember the shoulders on which we stand. Our ancestors paved the way for all of us generations ago, in search of a better life for their mokopuna. But what he stressed was that our uniqueness as Pacific people is what sets us apart in the health sector, and we must embrace it as our strength. We are a people of hospitality, compassion, resilience, beauty, and grace. The art of navigation is in our genetic makeup. As we weave between two worlds, we acquire many skills that others are not fortunate enough to come across.

From its founding President Prerna Sehgal, to its current, the heart of PIHPSA remains the same. It is to equip young Pacific Health Professionals to be the next generation of Pacific leaders. We will shape our future communities and take the baton from our predecessors to continue its momentum. As our ancestors navigated foreign waters in the hopes of finding a new life, PIHPSA strives to guide students as they voyage through their own uncharted waters. We do this as a team, in the hope that a united health force will provide better service to our people.



PIHPSA Executive 2019, missing our Wellington & Christchurch Representatives.

Our founders saw a need for Pacific people within the university to reconnect, so that we may be inwardly strong to be outwardly effective. They started a ripple effect. As we continue to grow, there is summation of ripples that stir with each new year, only fortifying the passion of what PIHPSA stands for. We all have a responsibility to look after our people. However, it is equally crucial that the student body understands that we have been blessed with the opportunity to do so. The waves that such a movement will cause, will one day help to ameliorate health inequities and disparities that Pacific and Māori face in Aotearoa. Our impact will be made at full force.

“Our Pacific. Our People. Our Health”.

It is an honour to be your President for 2019.

Fakafetai lahi lele,

Fuatino Heath

About the author

> Fuatino Talia Heath is the PIHPSA President 2019. University of Otago & The Otago School of Medicine, 2017: Bachelor of Science, Majoring in Anatomy, 2018–2022: Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery

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I would love to acknowledge the PIHPSA Executive of 2019. I am proud to be part of your team.

Correspondence

Fuatino Heath: fuatinoheath@gmail.com