Tai timu tai pari: Nursing's role in health transformation

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2020 marked 35 years of the first peer-reviewed nursing journal - now named *Nursing Praxis in Aotearoa New Zealand*, reflecting biculturalism and the intent to promote the work of Māori authors and research – an important milestone for nursing. In this special edition of *Nursing Praxis*, contemporary perspectives have been sought on the writings of three nursing scholars (Jocelyn Keith, Irihapeti Ramsden, and Jill Wilkinson) and the respective themes from these articles.

When reading these articles (published between 1987 and 2008) one might sense some relevance of their *kōrero* to the current day. Sadly, the familiarity of these writings probably reflects the lack of progress in thinking, actions, and outcomes of the past 35 years.

I, like many of my colleagues, would rather not experience these *déjà vu* moments. However, after 35 years as a health professional I am gaining confidence that the tide is turning. In te ao Māori, this movement is referred to as "**tai timu tai pari**", reflecting the tidal ebb and flow. This analogy is relevant to the impending changes in the health system. The question is, what role will nursing play in this sea change or transformation?

We knew 2020 would be a big year, as we planned to celebrate International Year of the Nurse we were diverted to another priority. While COVID-19 changed our lives forever, it also set the context for healthcare to be critically re-examined. When honouring colleagues who have died from COVID-19, we also recognised how the critical role of nursing was brought sharply into focus by working collaboratively and where previous system barriers were annihilated.

Nursing was at the forefront of a significant health response; not due to being the largest health workforce, but by demonstrating the utility, flexibility, and moral imperative of a profession

committed to the wellbeing of communities. Lessons learnt regarding collaboration and speaking with one voice will hold nursing in a strong position within any future system changes.

The first *State of the World's Nursing* report (World Health Organization, 2020) was published in April 2020. Aotearoa New Zealand's nursing profile compared well to other countries. However, on reviewing the Report's ten key actions, Aotearoa needs to make improvements in several of these policy areas. These include continued investment in nursing; monitoring international nurse mobility focussing on the domestic production of nurses; nurturing young leaders; safe staffing; addressing the gender gap; and collaboration across systems. Further implications of the *State of the World's Nursing* report require nursing policy to align with the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015) by eradicating poverty, ensuring inclusive and equitable education; and achieving **universal health coverage** requiring access to quality care which is fundamental to population health and health equity.

In April 2021, the Minister of Health, Andrew Little, released a White Paper for **Health Reform** (Health & Disability Review Transition Unit, 2021) based upon the 2020 *Health & Disability System Review*, which had identified 86 significant changes required to the systems structure, leadership, and funding. The Health Reforms are perhaps more far-reaching than was anticipated, including replacing the 20 district health boards with a single organisation, Health NZ, and four regional entities; and a new Public Health Authority to centralise public health work. Perhaps most significant is the establishment of a Māori Health Authority in recognition of the government's obligations to Māori under Te Tiriti o Waitangi to support hauora Māori and promote equity. At a locality level, emphasis is placed on Te Tiriti partnerships with local iwi and Māori to shape health service design and delivery. Prior to the Review and White Paper, the Ministry of Health (MoH) placed a strong mark on the health landscape by providing a robust definition of equity. *Whakamaua: Māori Health Action Plan 2020-2025* articulated how to give effect to *He Korowai Oranga* (Ministry of Health, 2020) by providing a Te Tiriti o Waitangi framework.

The commitments articulated in 2021 by the aforementioned documents provide an enduring platform on which system reform is to occur and where nursing has a key role to play.

System change is already happening. For the first time in 2020 a nurse faced professional misconduct charges for racist remarks made online on social media. This incident raised concerns about the efficacy of cultural safety education and the need to address the rhetoric and racism (Manchester,

2020). There remains a fundamental issue of the 'watering down' of Kawa Whakaruruhau with the simplification of 'taking your shoes off at the front door'. A move from transactional tick box interactions to meaningful interventions requires further critical analysis of the power dynamics within nursing.

The National Nursing Leadership group (NNLg) is reflecting a more meaningful approach in committing to a Te Tiriti governance model. This leadership forum is a collective of nursing leaders who represent education, professional organisations, employers, the regulator (Nursing Council of New Zealand), and the MoH. Each member group is committed to attending meetings with their Te Tiriti partner, including Pacifica representation. Further, the NNLg are leading the development of a national nursing strategy that articulates the future of nursing and encapsulates the aspirations of the three nursing scholars featured in this special *Nursing Praxis* edition.

The tide is definitely turning. Having ended my time as Chief Nursing Officer at the MoH and as I now embark on a new journey as CEO for a Māori health provider, I welcome a new Chief Nurse who is Māori. This is another significant system change by having a Māori nurse at the decision-making table. Nau mai haere mai Lorraine Hetaraka. Nursing is well placed to lead system change and be at the forefront of innovation, the time is now with a permissive environment and commitment to Te Tiriti and addressing inequities.

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