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Dr Irihapeti Ramsden's powerful petition for cultural safety

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Article

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Synopsis

Dr Irihapeti Ramsden, Ngāi Tahu/Rangitane (1946-2003) was a Māori nurse, educationalist, philosopher, and writer, who leaves an enduring legacy for the development of Kawa Whakaruruhau (cultural safety) both in Aotearoa New Zealand and globally. "The way in which people measure and define their humanity" (Ramsden, 1990a, p. 35) - is the central tenet of this article. "Moving on" was a speech given by Dr Irihapeti Ramsden to Diploma of Nursing graduands at Nelson Polytechnic on 17th November 1989. Ramsden brought together an appreciation of Florence Nightingale's achievements and legacy and our ongoing obligation to provide health services that are respectful and responsive to the humanity of the people needing those services. Of Nightingale, she said, "[i]t would seem appropriate to remember the woman who set up the British model of nursing which still underpins nursing in this country to some extent. We owe respect to Florence Nightingale" (p. 34).

The paper offered a revision of Nightingale's historical 'noblesse oblige' nursing ideology, where privileged people provided care to 'others' irrespective of nationality, culture, creed, colour, age, sex, political, religious belief or social status. To facilitate a reduction in health inequities and improve



health outcomes for Māori, Ramsden recommended that the unique world views of Māori as tangata whenua (people of the land) and the new settlers, tauwi (non-Māori), be established and recognised. She reiterated that “the reintegration of body, soul and the environment as envisaged in the Ottawa Charter are part of the Māori reality” (p. 35).

Most importantly was that Māori health (*hauora Māori*) - the most precious taonga (treasured possession) of all - be maintained with due autonomy and authority. The delivery of appropriate, expert, and equitable healthcare services underpinned by respect, negotiation, partnership, and informed consensual decision-making would then align with the guarantee of *tinō rangātiratanga* (self-determination) made within Aotearoa New Zealand’s founding document, Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The intent of Te Tiriti was to help establish an environment in Aotearoa whereby both tangata whenua and tauwi could live respective of human difference, acknowledging their different realities. Within the speech antiquated notions of power and relationships in nursing were reframed and contemporised with a simple but powerful interchange of words. Essentially, Ramsden pivots on the word “irrespective” simply shifting it to “respective”.

Standout paragraph (Ramsden, 1990a, p. 35):

Only one word needs to be altered in order to suitably change the old nursing philosophy to become appropriate for the end of the 20th century and onward to the 21st. That word is *irrespective*. By adjusting it to become *respective*, the objective of nurses to give appropriate service delivery can be achieved. Nurses provide care, *respective* of the nationality of human beings, the culture of human beings, the age, the sex, the political and the religious beliefs of other members of the human race.

The article in context

Ramsden’s legacy of Kawa Whakaruruhau (or cultural safety) is a unique taonga (treasure) in nursing in Aotearoa. Her two articles on Kawa Whakaruruhau – Cultural safety in nursing education Aotearoa (NZ) (Ramsden, 1993) and Cultural safety: Kawa Whakaruruhau ten years on: A personal overview (Ramsden, 2000) – have the greatest number of citations of any published in *Nursing Praxis*. The number of citations is just one measure of the impact of her leadership and influence in nursing and



healthcare. Beyond Aotearoa, Ramsden's work has shaped nursing and health professions globally, through indigenous scholarship, innovation, and activism (Koptie, 2009).

Despite cultural safety being a required nursing competence in Aotearoa since the early 1990s, it appears to have had little impact on the experiences of, and outcomes for, Māori in healthcare services. Racism within the health sector, and in nursing, is evident (Harris et al, 2018). The Waitangi Tribunal (2019) **Health Services and Outcomes Kaupapa Inquiry** (WAI 2575) found health services were not meeting their Te Tiriti obligations to actively protect hauora Māori. Further, the Tribunal identified considerable inequities experienced by the Māori nursing workforce. Qualitative research has described the emotional labour undertaken by Māori nurses working in healthcare services that are not culturally safe (Hunter & Cook, 2020). While the rhetoric of Te Tiriti responsiveness, particularly in achieving mana taurite (equity) is evident across Ministry of Health policy, the reality demonstrates this is an aspiration hindered by layers of eurocentric privileging throughout current systems and practices (Health & Disability System Review, 2020; Roberts, 2020). As stipulated in the recently released Cabinet White Paper on the **Health Reforms (Health and Disability Review Transition Unit, 2021)**, a Māori Health Authority will be established as a response to the government's requirements to meet its legislative obligations under Te Tiriti. The intent is that this authority will partner with the new organisation Health NZ on health strategy and policy, and fund and commission kaupapa Māori and te o Māori-grounded services (where Māori knowledge systems and world views are prioritised). At a local level, the inclusion of iwi and Māori in designing health services gives opportunity to ensure Kawa Whakaruruhau is structurally embedded. Nursing, as the largest health workforce, will need to embrace the mahi (work) required to achieve such necessary and transformational change.

Dr Irihapeti Ramsden's ground-breaking Kawa Whakaruruhau framework remains critically relevant today. The International Year of the Nurse (2020) coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic and has sharply highlighted how structural racism adversely affects health. Indigenous, minority Ethnic, Black, and Asian populations have been most disadvantaged, including within the nursing and health workforce (Razai, 2021). #BlackLivesMatter has propelled such issues onto the global political stage. The profession of nursing is challenged today to dismantle racism and discrimination as well as those ideologies that maintain them (Moorley et al, 2020).



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