Te hikoi o Kawa Whakaruruhau inanahi ki aiane: The journey to cultural safety yesterday to today

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How far have we all journeyed as nurses since Dr Irihapeti Ramsden, then Education Officer, Māori Health and Nursing, Ministry of Education, delivered her October 26, 1989 address entitled “*He aha te mea nui o te Ao?*” (What is the most important thing in the world?) (Ramsden, 1989). Expounding on the importance of wairua and mana within her kōrero, Irihapeti further challenged nursing in her historic report to the Ministry of Education, *Kawa Whakaruruhau: Cultural safety in nursing education in Aotearoa* (Ramsden, 1990b). In the graduation speech, “Moving on”, she stated, “The time has arrived to review the philosophy which underlines nursing service here.” (Ramsden, 1990a, p. 35).

My first meeting with Irihapeti in 1990 was as an attendee during a national hui for Māori Health employees at Tapu o Te Ranga Marae, Island Bay, Wellington. Her address included Te Tiriti o Waitangi, negotiated partnership, and Kawa Whakaruruhau, stressing the importance of including the cultural mores in the delivery of health care for tangata whenua tūrora (patients). We were inspired, enlightened, empowered and motivated to share this newly found knowledge on return to our various workplaces. My next encounter with Irihapeti was as a newly appointed nurse educator at Nelson Polytechnic. Nelson Polytechnic’s then enthusiastic and supportive head of nursing, Debbie Penlington, eager to set up a Komiti Kawa Whakaruruhau, had invited Irihapeti to hui (meet) with a rōpū (group) of Māori registered nurses, iwi (tribal) representatives and others in 1992. The outcome of the rōpū hui was the establishment of Komiti (Committee) Kawa Whakaruruhau and its composition was in accordance with the recommendations set out on page 8 of the 1990 report (Ramsden, 1990b).

Komiti Kawa Whakaruruhau, now at Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology, is entering its 29th year of existence.

Experientially, as a seasoned Māori nurse educator with a history of 50 plus years in the profession, I do believe that there has been much movement forward by those who have deemed it necessary to become enlightened about the historical and present struggles that continue to impact upon the health of tangata whenua in this land (Walker, 1990). Then there are others who purport to support the concept of Kawa Whakaruruhau and yet still continue to thwart its progression and remain reluctant to relinquish the reins of power and control.

The inclusion and implementation of Kawa Whakaruruhau, Te Tiriti, and hauora Māori within nursing education curricula throughout Aotearoa commenced in 1990 and though inconsistent, its progression continues to this day. As nurses, in order to be participants engaged in improving the hauora and health outcomes of tangata whenua, we all need to continue to embrace this whakatauakī (saying or proverb):

He aha te mea a nui o Te Ao?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

What is the most important thing in the world?

It is people, it is people, it is people

References

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