

Pacific Health Research Centre, Whitireia Community Polytechnic, Wellington

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In 1996 the Health Research Council approved the setting up of a Pacific Health Research Centre at Whitireia Community Polytechnic in Porirua. The Centre was charged with two major functions by the Health Research Council. They were to "develop a Pacific health research workforce and the implementation of a research programme to address the paucity of health research for Pacific people."

The original determination to apply for a Research Centre at Whitireia was spearheaded by the then Chief Executive Officer of the Polytechnic, Mr Turoa Royal. Since its establishment in 1986 Whitireia Community Polytechnic has developed strong links with Pacific communities in Porirua and the wider Wellington Region. These links have been strengthened over the years by visits to Pacific nations by the senior Directorate and Councillors. In 1994 for example a delegation of Council and Directorate staff travelled to Samoa and to the Cook Islands. The Polytechnic also has had the honour of hosting important delegations from Pacific nations such as Tonga and Samoa. Over the years, the polytechnic has developed a reputation for achieving successful education outcomes for students from the Pacific communities. This success has been reflected across the board in all levels of academic and vocational tertiary education.

The decision to submit a proposal for the establishment of a Pacific Health Research Centre at Whitireia was based on the support given to the Polytechnic by the Pacific communities. As the second largest population of Pacific people in New Zealand, local people wished to see a Centre for Research that reflected their concerns, and to have their issues and aspirations addressed. Strong support for the venture was also provided by a wide range of health professionals and researchers from both Victoria University and the Wellington Medical School.

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Since the Health Research Council approved the establishment of the Research Centre, work has been undertaken in 1997 to establish the infrastructure and framework to ensure the Centre operates from a sound base. In April of this year Margaret Southwick was appointed the Director of the Centre. Prior to this appointment Margaret was Head of School of Nursing and Health Studies at Whitireia. Margaret has had a long association in health education, and was a major influence in developing the Bachelor of Nursing curriculum at Whitireia. Margaret's ethnic heritage comes from her pakeha New Zealand father and her Tuvaluan mother.

The number of Pacific students graduating from the Nursing Degree programme at Whitireia is to some extent explained by the positive role modelling provided by Pacific staff members such as Margaret. At the present time Margaret is a PhD candidate at Victoria University of Wellington. The successful completion of this award is her principal research activity at the present time.

In recent weeks Margaret has been joined by Ramona von Dincklage who has been appointed as Administrative Secretary. Lanuola Asiasiga was recently appointed to the position of Senior Researcher for the Centre. Lanuola has an outstanding record in research related especially to the health of Pacific peoples.

The Centre has been busy establishing networks and collaborative links with a range of institutions and organisations who are themselves involved in health research. While it is early days yet, we believe that the long term health and well-being of Pacific people is best served through the collaborative development of expertise and knowledge. In September, Margaret and Lanuola met with staff of the Pacific Health Research Centre in the University of Auckland. This was an important opportunity for the two Centres to identify common goals and collaborative ventures which will lead to improving health for Pacific communities.

The immediate challenge for the Centre now focuses on our two primary functions of developing research expertise amongst Pacific people and the implementation of a research programme. We welcome your support and interest in undertaking these tasks. □