

5th International Conference on Diabetes and Indigenous Peoples. Christchurch, New Zealand. October 2000

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The 5th International Conference on Diabetes and Indigenous Peoples, the first international conference hosted in the Southern hemisphere, welcomed attendees to Christchurch, New Zealand on October 3-6, 2000. Its theme, "Te Hikoi o Nga Mokopuna," "Walking with our Grandchildren," was an opportunity to contribute to the health and welfare of our future generations.

*Hangaia Te Oranga Hou
Hangaia Te Ara Hou
Kia Hikoi Tahī Ki A Tatou
Mokopuna*

Build a healthy lifestyle
Build a new pathway
To walk with our
grandchildren

Mihimihi (Welcome). We were welcomed at the Nga Hau E Wha, the National Marae, or meeting house, with speeches and songs by Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu, the 18-member tribal council. This was followed by afternoon tea in the British tradition. Charles Crofts, Conference Chairperson, welcomed attendees with the charge, "this conference will be vital in providing a forum to discuss and disseminate information and practices to assist indigenous people with diabetes, their families, health professional and all those interested in the prevention of diabetes." The conference will enable Maori and indigenous people from other parts of the world, to join forces and address this growing epidemic. It is our children and grandchildren who will judge the success of this conference."

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The conference was planned around seven goals and six objectives. Thirteen international keynote speakers, 77 workshop presentations, and numerous networking/learning opportunities were offered in a rich cultural and spiritual setting. The conference song, "Mate Huka," written and sung by Sheree Waitoa, a young Maori woman, was powerful and haunting, reminding us of our connections to our past and our future. Throughout the conference, personal messages were communicated in the Maori language and songs of appreciation were delivered to speakers. The conference included a youth forum entitled, "Strategies for Life," to provide youth of all cultures with a time to share experiences, to discuss the impact of diabetes in their lives and communities, as well as to address current youth issues, trends, and habits.

Tiki (The Legend of Creation). Master carver Mike Wallace was asked by Bill Solomon, spokesperson of Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu, to re-create *Tiki* for the 5th International Conference. Mike felt good to do so, because the re-creation brought understanding of *Tiki*. Mike's *waka* (family) ties are Takitimu, Kurahaupo, and Aotea. *Tiki* is the legend of Creation, the children of Ranginui (sky father) and Papatuanuku (mother earth), and involved in the creation of life on earth. Tane (one of the children) was one, if not the main, life-bringer. Tane, with his brothers, created Hine Titama the first woman, for Tane. Tumatauenga then thought he would create the first man—Tiki. This is how we came to be, through the breeding of the children of Tane, Hine, and Tiki. This is also how Tumatauenga became god of Man and War. The conference *Tiki*, carved out of native woods, stood over 12 feet tall on stage and depicted 3 sets of layered figures in graduated sizes representing grandparents, parents and children.

Te Runanga o Ngai Tahu. In the conference book, we learned:

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"Ngai Tahu is the Maori Tribe of the southern islands of New Zealand, who settled around 1,000 years ago. In 1840, the tribe became a signatory to the Treaty of Waitangi. [The tribe began in 1848] to

highlight the violations of the Treaty by the Crown. In 1998, Ngai Tahu and the New Zealand Government agreed upon an Apology and Settlement for these violations. The Apology was delivered [in November 1998] on behalf of the Crown by the then-Prime Minister ... The Settlement included cash of NZ\$170 million, as well as mechanisms for cultural redress and management of tribal taonga (items of great value), including natural resources."

Our learning from the Australian aborigines was of their challenges to establish many human rights issues and self-identity, and how their simple ways of life are in conflict with present-life styles. Native American Indians, Alaskan Natives, French Canadians, and other Pacific Islanders all spoke of the complications of diabetes in their communities and the initiatives to meet these challenges. We heard about Type 2 diabetes in lean children from Vanuatu and the issues surrounding the incidence in younger populations. We could easily relate to the frustrations expressed by the stories and effects on families. We saw and admired the work that was being done on behalf of diabetes around the world. These indigenous peoples truly know and are able to demonstrate that they must control their choices, resources, education, and health outcomes. Native minority peoples see their healthcare outcomes as their right and responsibility to determine.

"Pacific Footprints" Workshop. A group of six individuals, health care professionals, and community persons from Hawai'i raised funds to attend and present a workshop titled "Pacific Footprints." This was a workshop on Pacific culture, values, beliefs, practices, and protocols in community-based health planning. We talked about the need for collaborative teamwork, how cultural knowledge and expertise reside with the community, the need for culturally appropriate diabetes education materials, and how leadership by indigenous peoples must come from individuals in a group voice. Using *oli* (Hawaiian chants), *hula* (dance), *'umeke* (calabash bowl) filled with the wisdom of *'Ōlelo no'eau* (Hawaiian proverbs), presenters extended *aloha* to the audience who received and embraced the Hawaiian spirit and passion. During the *Nau Mai Haere Mai* (dinner reception), the Hawai'i delegation presented to conference chairperson Charles Croft, a carved *ipu heke*, or gourd vessel, which carried the wisdom of our ancestors to Aotearoa.

Closing. The closing event at the National Marae included messages of appreciation followed by a traditional Maori *hangi* meal where foods are bundled and steamed in the ground. As first-time visitors from Hawai'i,

we were welcomed with the spirit and passion of the people of New Zealand (Aotearoa). We looked into their past and future plans in the area of diabetes healthcare initiatives. We learned that Maori people are much more comfortable with who they are than are Hawaiians. We felt a strong connection to the people, their culture, their language, and their song. We learned about and experienced Maori hospitality, cultural protocols, and practices. We also learned much about Maori thinking and their initiatives working directly with people through community-based approaches. We were blessed by the richness of different presenters and have continued to communicate with new colleagues about our work in the Pacific.

This work continues through Papa Ola Lōkahi and the Pacific Diabetes Today Resource Center (PDTRC) Project (the latter funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC]). This project offers community-based planning through the Pacific Diabetes Today curriculum.

PDTRC makes available training on community planning and technical assistance support in six Western Pacific jurisdictions and Hawai'i. This Project helps groups who want to develop and carry

out a diabetes intervention project for their community. "Pacific Lessons Learned" from this work with Pacific partners will be communicated to CDC and disseminated as a best practices resource. Papa Ola Lōkahi is a Hawai'i not-for-profit consortium that offers planning, administrative, and technical assistance to projects in Hawai'i and the Pacific. PDTRC fits within Papa Ola Lōkahi's mission, which is to improve the health status and well-being of native peoples by advocating, initiating, and maintaining culturally appropriate strategic actions aimed at improving the physical, mental, and spiritual health and wellness of native peoples and empowering them to determine their own destinies.

We strongly encourage interested individuals and groups to attend the next conference scheduled two years from now in Australia. The conference is truly a moving, awareness-expanding experience.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful and appreciative for trip funding provided by the HMSA Foundation, Bristol Myers Squibb—Hawai'i and Papa Ola Lōkahi, which supplemented each traveler's personal funds. ■

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