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Funding grant welcome by advocate for aspiring Māori surgeons

Waitematā DHB surgical registrar Dr Jamie-Lee Rahiri knew she wanted to be a doctor by the time she was in her sixth-form year at Northcote College.

Nearly a decade later, she has completed her medical training at the University of Auckland and recently graduated with a PhD in Surgery, which was acknowledged with a vice-chancellor's award for best doctoral thesis earlier this year.

Dr Rahiri (Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Whātua and Te Atihaunui-a-Pāpārangi) is focused on building a pro-equity and culturally safe surgical workforce for the benefit of all patients who require surgical care.

Now, she is one step closer to realising that ambition as the recipient of a Health Research Council Health Delivery Research Grant totalling nearly \$30,000.

Over the next 12 months, Dr Rahiri alongside Māori clinical leaders Professor Jonathan Koea (Waitematā DHB surgical consultant), Dr Maxine Ronald and Associate Professor Matire Harwood will use the funding to help lay the groundwork for the establishment of *Te Piringa Kotuku* – an independent Māori surgical research and training institute.

Work will include:

- a scoping review of kaupapa Māori health interventions to help determine the group's terms of reference
- focus groups with multiple parties including medical students, junior doctors, Te ORA – Te Ohu Rata o Aotearoa (The Māori Medical Practitioners Association), He Kamaka Waiora (Māori Health Services) and various academic partners.

The group will also build strong relationships with iwi, hapū, health organisations and other clinical stakeholders, with a long-term vision to collaboratively encourage and support more Māori into the surgical field.

Dr Rahiri says less than 1% of surgeons in the New Zealand medical workforce are Māori.

“We know that Māori health workforce development is essential to eliminating longstanding Māori health inequities” she says.

“Recent policies within several surgical training bodies have been established to support Māori patients and whānau within surgery.

“However, more work is required to ensure that our profession is culturally safe and that aspiring Māori surgeons are well-supported to fill future leadership positions and conduct transformational research that advances Māori health.”

Waitematā DHB CEO Dr Dale Bramley (Ngāpuhi, Ngāti Hine) says Dr Rahiri’s work will play an important part among ongoing efforts to ensure and maintain equity in the public health system.

“Māori have a higher disease burden and are disproportionately worse in social and health statistics,” he says.

“We need a workforce that better reflects the community we serve in order to improve health outcomes for Māori,” Dr Bramley says. “I congratulate Dr Rahiri on securing funding for this important kaupapa and look forward to seeing the results.”

Waitematā DHB saw the number of reported Māori in its workforce increase by 83% between June 2016 and June 2021.

CAPTION: Dr Jamie-Lee Rahiri

Ends

To arrange an interview with Dr Jamie-Lee Rahiri, please call:
Waitematā DHB Media Line
Phone (09) 4871276