

Māori nurses key for Pharmac

Pharmac is running three wānanga with Te Rūnanga o Aotearoa this financial year, hoping to improve Māori access to medications.

By co-editor Mary Longmore

About 20 Māori registered, enrolled and student nurses and nurse practitioners turned up to a Bay of Plenty wānanga in September, supported by Pharmac to improve Māori access to medications.

Held at Putaruru's Mangakaretu Marae on September 6-7, Te Rūnanga o Aotearoa NZNO Midlands representative Tracey Morgan said the noho (overnight) marae visit was "amazing".

"We had heaps of positive feedback. This was an opportunity for our rōpū from midlands to understand the role of Pharmac."

Pharmac's senior advisor Māori responsiveness, Karen Jacobs-Grant, said He Rongoā Pai He Oranga Whānau (whānau staying well with medicines) programme began in 2006. It was intended to help keep Māori well, with improved understanding of, access to and safe use of prescribed medications. Evidence suggested Māori were missing out on a million prescriptions every year,¹ she said.

Māori nurses were "crucial" to the pro-



Māori pharmacist Leanne Te Karu with Te Rūnanga representative Tracey Morgan, former Pharmac kaiwhakahaere whakarata Māori Ātene Andrews, Te Rūnanga member Maria Tutahi and GP Peter Jansen.

gramme's success. It was originally set up with Māori community health workers and primary health nurses, as they had strong links to Māori consumers of prescribed medicines, Jacobs-Grant said. "That hasn't changed. What has changed is the role of the nurse. Increasing

'We think rongoā practitioners are amazing, but we have other medicines too.'

numbers of nurses are achieving nurse practitioner and prescriber roles, which means an increasing prescriber base and access to medicines for whānau."

Pharmac considered nurses "key influencers", advocates and positive role models. With their knowledge, expertise and understanding of tikanga, kawa (policy), Māori health needs and practice, Māori nurses were an important support for whānau, she said.

Māori prescribing pharmacist Leanne Te Karu, of Ngā Kai-tiaki o te Puna Rongoā (Māori Pharmacists' Association), and Māori GP Peter Jansen facilitated the Bay of Plenty wānanga. Morgan said Pharmac staff explained some medication for conditions such as hepatitis C or diabetes

would be prohibitively expensive without Pharmac subsidies. This was relevant for Māori who, along with Pacific Island populations, tended to lead co-morbidity rates.

Practitioners of Māori rongoā – traditional medicine – were also welcomed, as Pharmac wanted to reassure Māori it was not opposed to rongoā, in fact believed traditional and modern medicine could be complementary, Morgan said. "They said, 'We think rongoā practitioners are amazing, but we have other medicines too', so it was good to get that across."

Jacobs-Grant said combining modern and traditional approaches was increasingly common in the health sector, as Pharmac strove to be more responsive to Māori.

A second wānanga with Te Rūnanga was held at Te Rau Aroha Marae in Bluff last month and a third is planned for Hawke's Bay in March. In May, Te Rūnanga member Margaret Hand ran a wānanga in Whangarei and, in 2018, Pharmac worked with tumu whakarae Titihuia Pakeho to run Te Rūnanga's first Pharmac wānanga at Ngāpeke Marae, Tauranga.

Jacobs-Grant said inequitable health outcomes for whānau Māori were partly due to variable access to medicines. Pharmac was committed to improve access over the next four years. •



September's wānanga at Mangakaretu Marae, held by Pharmac and Te Rūnanga o Aotearoa.

References

1) Auckland UniServices, University of Auckland. (2018). *Variation in medicines use by ethnicity*. Retrieved from www.pharmac.govt.nz/assets/2018-01-19-Variation-in-medicines-use-by-ethnicity-Final-Report.pdf

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