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Waitematā DHB nurturing and growing the Māori workforce



New Waitematā DHB graduate doctor Helen Kearns

New Waitematā DHB employee Helen Kearns had a later-in-life call to become a doctor. Helen always had a passion for health care and first started training as a nurse. “Getting into nursing was all I ever wanted,” she says. “I had a Māori lecturer who suggested I apply to medical school. She saw my potential and seeded the thought in my head. It took me a few years to have the confidence to do it but her support was instrumental.”

Helen, who is of Ngāti Kurī and Te Rarawa descent, is one of 100 new-graduate doctors who have just started work at Waitematā DHB.

She was an older student, balancing her studies with being a mother of two busy boys. Her organisational skills, ability to look at situations differently and life experiences all helped in her journey to become a doctor.

“Waitematā DHB was my first calling,” she says. “I’ve lived my whole life in West Auckland. It has a diverse population which I love. These are my people. They can be complex and many of them are struggling in a variety of ways. I have an affinity for them and I want to give back to my community.”

Waitematā DHB is proud to offer support, education and learning opportunities designed with, for and by Māori health workers. This is an important part of a bigger plan to employ a workforce that reflects the cultural diversity of the population and provides best care for everyone.

Waitematā DHB runs a Health Scholarship Programme to support Māori and Pacific people living in its catchment to complete undergraduate healthcare-specific study with an accredited New Zealand education provider. Information on the programme is available here:

<https://www.unitec.ac.nz/sites/default/files/public/Waitemata%20DHB%20Health%20Scholarship%20programme%20leaflet.pdf>

“As well as providing financial support to achieve study goals, we also provide that all-important link to our DHB so that students can access practical placement opportunities and get help to begin a rewarding career after completing their study,” Dr Dale Bramley, Waitematā DHB Chief Executive, says.

“Achieving equitable health care for Māori is a priority for our DHB. We know there are inequities for Māori in our health system and barriers to treatment for some of the people who need it most,” he says. “Māori have a higher disease burden and are disproportionately worse in social and health statistics. In order to address these issues, Māori need to be in positions of leadership and decision-making to support the expansion of, and access to, Māori kaupapa services which contribute to improved outcomes. Increased numbers of Māori doctors will help address inequities and barriers for Māori in the health system and encourage more Māori to consider a career in health,” says Dr Bramley.

Nationally, Waitematā DHB has the lowest gap between percentage of Māori staff and the working age population, compared to other New Zealand DHBs. In 2009, we employed 350 Māori staff and we have grown to 615 as of January 2022.

Ends.

For further information, contact:

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