

CONFERENCE REPORT

PASIFIKA MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (PMA) CONFERENCE REPORT 8TH – 10TH SEPTEMBER 2010, AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Lameko V

Oceania University of Medicine

The participants at this conference attending from Samoa were:

- Toleafoa Dr Viali Lameko: Senior Clinical Lecturer and Clinical Coordinator, OUM
- Adam Howman-Keil, OUM MBBS 2nd year student
- Tasha Shon, OUM MBBS 3rd year student
- Leo'o Dr John Adams, Pediatrician and Technical Advisor
- Dr Satupaitea Viali: PMA Senior Advisor



Figure 1: Conference Participants from Samoa - Toleafoa Dr Viali Lameko, Leo'o Dr John Adams, student Adam Howman-Keil Front. Dr Satupaitea Viali, and student Tasha Shon

The objectives of the 2010 Conference were:

1. To share new research data and evidence for best practice from across all disciplines of medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, public health, health governance and paramedical.
2. To discuss innovative ideas and models for improving patient care and management at all levels of the health systems in New Zealand (NZ) and the Pacific island countries.
3. To discuss methods and tools to help the

young Pacific island students living in New Zealand to achieve their goals in any field of health care.

4. To provide a platform for young, aspiring medical students to discuss short and long terms plans for post-graduate training within NZ and abroad.
5. To provide an opportunity for the Pacific pediatricians and advisors to hold a meeting to discuss pilot projects by Dr Teuila Percival and the University of Auckland.
6. To seek a consensus amongst Pacific pediatricians about forming a 'Pasifika Paediatric Society'.
7. To reflect on what has been achieved
8. To share experiences of clinicians working in the Pacific Islands.

Introduction

The Pasifika Medical Association (PMA) was established in 1996 and is funded by members' subscriptions and sponsorships.

PMA's Vision is "*Pacific health professional of excellence, working together to meet the health needs of Pacific people in the region.*"

Its Mission Statement is "*To strengthen the Pacific health workforce capacity and capability in the region.*"

The PMA Annual Conference is the largest meeting of Pacific health workers and professionals from across the region. Issues discussed are not only relevant to NZ but also to the Pacific island countries. It is an opportunity to collaborate on a range of issues important to improving the health outcomes of Pacific people. Sharing stories and learning experiences and best-practice models are the overarching principles that drive the PMA.

Every year's conference has a new theme and for 2010 it was "**Changing Our Future**". This theme allowed the PMA members and its associate members to deliberate over the subthemes:

- *How to meet the challenges of a changing workforce in the Pacific island countries*
- *Evidence and policy developments in the health system*
- *Evidence-based policy and decision-making in clinical practice across the Pacific.*

This is the second time the author has been invited to the PMA Conference, with the first in 2006.

Plenary Sessions and what the author has

learnt from attending the conference.

The Hon Georgina Te Heuheu QSO, Minister of Pacific Island Affairs in NZ was the Keynote Speaker and the Government representative who officially opened the conference. She made specific reference to the significant and valuable contribution that the Pacific island people have made to the NZ health sector. She stated that as NZ was now a multi-ethnic country, addressing social, economical, environmental, and health issues amongst Pacific island people living there was a top priority of government. She concluded her address by asking the PMA to continue to work with the NZ Ministry of Health and District Health Boards to make sure service delivery was well-planned and culturally sensitive to achieve favor-



Figure 2. OUM Students Adam Howman-Keil Front and Tasha Shon

able health outcomes for Pacific people.

One of the plenary speeches was delivered by the Hon Dr Viliami Tangi, Deputy Prime Minister and Health Minister for Tonga. He again emphasized the need for the Pacific health leaders to lead by example and commit time in developing long-term strategic plans in all areas of the health system especially workforce development and finance allocations. As a professional surgeon, he reiterated the difficult pathway medical graduates outside New Zealand had to endure in order to enter a Fellowship training program in the early eighties when he started his surgical training. However he made it clear to young members of PMA that if he could do it, then everyone could also do it with flying colors. He concluded his address by thanking the PMA executives in the past for keeping the flame burning and the hopes of Pacific island medical officers as strong as ever.

The address by Dr Tearikivao Maoate, president of the PMA, was about future directions in policy and human resource development in the Pacific island countries and how countries like NZ could reach out to help. He concluded his speech by challenging the Pacific medical community to contribute positively to the changes that are happening in the health sectors across the Pacific island countries.

One of the highlights and much anticipated events of the conference was the panel presentation on *“Using evidence in Clinical Settings”*. Pacific island consultants, Dr Alec Ekeroma (Middlemore Hospital in New Zealand), Dr Satupaitea Viali (Samoa), Dr Wame Baravilala (Fiji), and Dr Richard Leona (Vanuatu) spoke about the importance of trying to keep up with the latest evidence and applying it to practice. Although everyone agreed that the practicing clinicians needed to be up-to-date with the new evidence to inform practice, some of the old medical practitioners shared their own experiences and expressed that they would like to stick with *“what seems to work with their patients.”*

A presentation by Dr Berlin Kafoa of the Fiji School of Medicine (FSM) was also interesting and thought-provoking as that institution continues to develop as a regional medical school and contributes to the health of the Pacific people. He concluded his speech by inviting the Oceania University of Medicine and the Papua New Guinea Medical School to join hand in hand with the FSM in sharing experiences and resources that will be of benefit to each other and to the health of Pacific people.

Last but not the least, was a strong message from the clinicians to the public health physicians to include clinical units as part of health planning and primary health care. That is, not to exclude clinicians from public health intervention planning and implementation. This I think was news to my ears. This indicates new thinking and direction from the clinician’s perspective and is the more realistic and achievable direction for the future of health and the practice of medicine in the Pacific.

Recommendations from the author after attending this meeting

1. That senior clinicians working in the Pacific who are involved with daily decision-making about patients’ care attend this annual conference. Not only it is relevant to our practice but it also provides a summary of the latest evidence in respective disciplines of interest.
2. That we revitalize technical advisory committees and task forces within the health sector so that medical doctors alike have an opportunity to share information and identify priority clinical areas and subsequently start looking into organizing clinical audits for any weak areas of care and practice.
3. That we sustain the current facilitation and public consultation of any draft clinical guidelines and protocols that are used and have been amended for harmonization of clinical practice amongst medical officers and nurses both in the public and private

- sector.
4. That we redefine primary health care in the context of the Samoan values and health systems and see how GPs can be engaged to play a significant role.
 5. That medical doctors are reminded about their vital role in documenting clear and accurate data for surveillance purposes which is vital as it can inform practice on a daily basis.
 6. That the PMA and associate members develop and design qualitative and operational research which could inform practice and improve service delivery at all levels.

Conclusion

I would like to congratulate the PMA for organizing and staging yet another successful conference. We have come a long way since our prompt response to the needs of the Pacific island people residing in New Zealand and in the islands by the establishment of this association in 1996.

It is a challenge to put this “workforce and brain-drain issue” on the agenda because of many push and pull factors across all sectors in each respective country. However it is a road that has to be

taken. I still challenge everyone and especially medical officers in leadership positions to encourage their young colleagues to pursue post-graduate training in their areas of interest. There is no more honorable and productive calling than this one.

Our Pacific people should be protected from the adverse effects of globalization.

I urge my colleagues to continue to improve the standard of care to our patients by performing our duties with honor and respect to the patient while preventing mistakes and power struggles amongst ourselves.

Acknowledgement

I would like to acknowledge the Oceania University of Medicine for endorsing and approving my participation in this conference. A special thank you goes to Dr Teuila Percival and the Regional Pacific Indicator Project for funding my airfares and accommodation. I would also like to acknowledge Polynesian Blue Airlines for sponsoring the airfares of two of our medical students who accompanied me to this conference.