

# 'Meeting the Challenge'

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It is probably appropriate that the theme for this year's RNZCGP Annual Conference (to be held in Rotorua) is 'Meeting the Challenge'. The All Blacks will no doubt take their new haka into the World Cup and lay down the challenge to the world's best. I hope the College Conference will similarly lay down important challenges at a memorable meeting. Some of the challenges that are faced by general practice today are common across the developed world – an ageing patient population with multiple co-morbidity; rising expectations from patients and funders to be met with limited resources; the availability of a plethora of technology, much of which has yet to be formally evaluated in a general practice setting. At the same time there are challenges which are unique to New Zealand; providing services that are appropriate and acceptable to Maori, tackling the medical workforce issues (particularly in rural areas) when as a country we are the most heavily reliant in the OECD on overseas trained doctors; the rapidly changing environment brought about by the Primary Health Care strategy and the influence of PHOs.

In our conference programme we have tried to pick up on some of these areas. As usual we have three core streams at the conference – part of the programme picks up on the topics highlighted above, through keynote addresses and follow-up sessions in our regular breakouts. We also have an exciting scientific programme and, of course, a range of CME options. Our first keynote speaker is Larry Green, an inspirational speaker from the United States. In North America the challenges of managing increasingly complex chronic disease programmes in primary care is leading to specialisation and a resultant reduction in the number of 'generalist' family practi-

tioners. At the same time nurses in primary care are taking on many specialist roles. In New Zealand there have been many changes to the role of the generalist – GPs no longer practice obstetrics or give anaesthetics. Increasing numbers of doctors are giving up their commitment to providing out of hours care. Practices are becoming bigger and many doctors are developing specialist interests. Is the trend in New Zealand likely to follow that in the US? Will the general practitioner, offering continuity of care to the whole family, become an endangered species?

The other big challenge facing us at the moment is whether the model of general practice as a small business is the best way to meet the future? The generation of young doctors today are not interested in running their own practice. They want the flexibility of moving in and out of practices at short notice, taking time out from working and to have a family life. Work-life balance is becoming increasingly important. This trend, coupled to the increasing bureaucracy generated by government policy, means many practices are looking at different models of management and ownership. Strategies to improve retention and recruitment to general practice are key in meeting these demands. With the launch of the College's DVD aimed at attracting medical students to general practice, and discussion on the recent Ministry publication *'Reshaping medical education and training to meet the challenges of the 21st Century'* there are plenty of new ideas and materials available to address the problems of recruitment to general practice. Our keynote speakers on this topic are Lewis Ritchie, the James MacKenzie Professor of General Practice from Aberdeen in Scotland and Jonathan Newbury from South

Australia. Lewis is an advisor to the Scottish Health Department and Jonathan has been intimately involved in the University of Adelaide programme to attract medical students into rural general practice.

Our third topic is an in-depth look into quality in general practice. We will be using Lewis Ritchie's expertise in this area as well as hearing the challenge from Rod Jackson around managing cardiovascular risk and from Harry Pert from the Rotorua General Practice Group. We are also raising the profile of Maori health and have invited Dr Pita Sharples to address us on how general practitioners can best meet the needs of Maori. His talk will be followed by a workshop on cultural competency which will help doctors understand the principles behind the recently released guidelines issued by both the Medical Council of New Zealand and, at the conference, by the RNZCGP.

We have an attractive offering of academic sessions reflecting the research that is currently underway across the country, there are CME sessions and workshops available, and sessions that will be of interest to practice managers and nurses. There will be a chance to visit the unique environment of Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Rotorua and there is a workshop on musculoskeletal problems being run by their medical director, Peter Jones. We have put together a vibrant and exciting conference programme and invite you to join us. Charles Darwin's oft quoted statement: *'It is not the strongest species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change'* is surely relevant to general practitioners in the 21st century. We hope when you leave this year's conference you will feel better equipped to respond to the changes and challenges that lie ahead.