



We can learn all sorts of things from listening to our patients.

I was once talking to an old kuia about her diabetes and we somehow got to talk about traditional Maori medicine. She told me about using Koromiko for diarrhoea and Kawakawa for constipation and then smiled and said, *'It's a shame that the sawmill no longer issues boots.'*

I knew that many of the local Maori had worked at the sawmill for years and that one of the perks of the job was the issue of waterproof clothing and leather boots. My curiosity was aroused and the old kuia anticipated my response and went on to tell

me that the boots were a great treatment for piles.

Apparently she would cut the top off a four gallon kerosene tin and place an old leather boot inside the tin and light it. When it was smoking away the possessor of the piles would sit on the top of the tin and this would give great relief.

We laughed at the irony that this was a traditional cure using Pakeha resources – a true blending of cultural traditions. Unfortunately this remedy has disappeared due to resource constraints. The leather boots are no longer issued and four gallon kerosene tins are a relic from the past.

This is a column written from the swamp. The term is taken from the book by Donald Schon¹ where he talks about the crisis of confidence in professional knowledge thus:

In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solutions.

1. Schon DA. Educating the reflective practitioner. Jossey-Bass Publishers 1990.

Contributions

We invite amusing contributions to this column which should be relevant to the swamp and not more than 600 words.