

## *Waitemata District Health Board – New to HCA Programme Cultural Celebration*

An initiative to address an ongoing shortage of healthcare assistants is also creating a pathway into skilled roles for Māori and Pacific people in the Waitemata region.

Waitemata District Health Board (DHB), the largest of New Zealand's district health boards, employs more than 7,500 staff who serve an ethnically diverse community of approximately 630,000 people in the North Shore, Waitakere, and Rodney regions. This population is expected to increase by more than a third in the next 25 years, and the number of Māori and Pacific people is predicted to rise more than other groups.

One of the core strategies for meeting the Waitemata DHB's commitments to improving health outcomes for Māori and other groups is to increase the organisation's Māori and Pacific workforce.

The New to HCA programme was developed four years ago to address a shortage of Māori healthcare assistants (HCA). Healthcare assistants provide patient care under the direction of a nurse or midwife and support the whole healthcare team.

Aware that the region had a pool of workers who would make excellent healthcare assistants but lacked the experience to enter the skilled workforce, the DHB's Director of Nursing and Midwifery Jocelyn Peach and Nurse Educator Lynley Davidson set up a four-week training programme, with one week of classroom-based learning and three weeks of work experience.

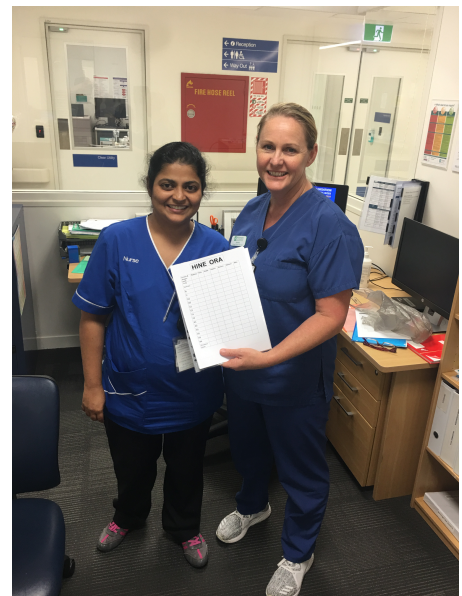
New to HCA was developed in conjunction with Waitemata DHB's Māori and Pacific Health teams to meet the objective of creating a culturally inclusive approach to workforce development, and to ensure the wrap around support helps counter common institutional barriers for this group of workers.

The first pilot took place in 2014 with 10 participants, and each year since there has been at least one intake of up to 12 trainees. The programme is open to anyone of Māori or Pacific descent who lives in the Waitemata DHB catchment area, and entry to the course is determined through an informal meet and greet.

The programme is unpaid but is free of charge; participants are provided with a uniform and treated as honorary employees for the duration of the course.

It begins with a powhiri at the Waitakere Hospital marae, supported by kaumatua, kuia and Pacific Health staff, giving participants a chance to meet the cultural support staff at the DHB and share their stories and what they believe the programme will offer them.

The classroom learning is relaxed and learner-centred, and the work experience placement gives trainees an opportunity to learn, observe and apply their new skills.



Trainees receive ongoing support from an employed healthcare assistant 'buddy', nursing staff and the leaders of the programme, both during the course and as they prepare to enter the workforce. This support can be provided via conversations, phone calls and texts, home visits and help filling in forms, cv writing and interview preparation.

A graduation ceremony follows the same format as the welcome, with karakia, waiata and whanaungatanga featuring prominently.

The success of the programme is evident in the high levels of sustained employment. Of the 49 participants in the New to HCA course in the past four years, only four did not complete the programme. More than 80 per cent of those who completed the course found employment as healthcare assistants. More than two thirds of those employees are still working at the DHB two years on.

Another benefit of the programme is that hiring managers can observe the candidate in the workplace - if a charge nurse manager does not have a vacancy, they can recommend the new healthcare assistant for another role in the hospital.

Nursing Workforce Development Nurse Consultant Jacqui Finch says the bond formed between trainees and nursing staff not only contributes to the success of the programme, it also creates benefits for the wider organisation. "It helps deliver better care to our patients."

For the trainees, the benefits are immense.

"This model is simple, low-cost and in four weeks helps a group of people who would not normally get a role such as this be employed and enjoying their work. They have gained confidence and know what they want to do ongoing," says Jocelyn Peach.

Once employed, healthcare assistants are encouraged, and financially supported, to complete the New Zealand Certificate in Healthcare Assistants Level 3 qualification, which is offered internally by the DHB. A little more than a quarter achieve their Level 3 certificate, and two students have gone on to study nursing.

One of those students, Maggie, joined the New to HCA course in 2016. She was 19, in part-time casual work and struggling to find a permanent role. Maggie had an interest in healthcare but did not know where to start. She also experienced significant anxiety, reporting that she would seldom leave the house unless it was for work.

As one of the younger participants she found the course challenging, but Maggie credits the structure and wrap around support of the programme for helping her complete it. Now she feels respected and supported as a healthcare professional. Maggie still struggles with anxiety but has felt empowered to overcome this to pursue her goal of becoming a nurse and possibly, one day, a midwife.

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