

Health system still failing Māori

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New Zealand's health education system is failing Māori, a South Island academic has told the annual Public Health Association Conference in Dunedin.

"As Māori we enter training and education in health with a particular set of knowledge and skills, which the system fails to recognise," Dr Khyla Russell from Otago Polytech told conference delegates in her keynote address.

"The New Zealand education system has no interface with Māori knowledge and this means we fail."

Dr Russell is Kaitohutohu at Otago Polytechnic and is responsible for ensuring that the Polytechnic is relevant to Māori.

Her position was created as a result of the memorandum of understanding with Arai-te-Uru Papatipu Runaka and the aspiration of the Polytech's former CEO – to have membership on Te Tapuae o Rehua, an iwi umbrella organisation that manages the relationship between South Island educational institutions and Māori.

"The challenge is how do we produce Māori-friendly staff? My role is to look at each department, check how relevant their course material is and how they manage their relationships with Māori students.

"Even disciplines like engineering now recognise their need to be aware of the needs of Māori. Iwi have money and are looking to invest in areas like engineering where engineers might be engaged with iwi."

Dr Russell is not phased by Māori failure, in fact she argues that it's not Māori who are failing.

"The system fails our people, it throws information at Māori without asking whether it relevant to them. They see us as failures and do not recognise when we are successful.

"My challenge to public health practitioners is what are you doing to marginalise Māori? And to health educationalists, what can you do to include Māori?"

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Contact: Dr Khyla Russell 021-735 587, Anton Blank 021-406 031