

# In defence of science

A recent report from a Government NCEA working group on proposed changes to the Māori school curriculum aims “to ensure parity with the other bodies of knowledge credentialed by NCEA (particularly Western/Pākehā epistemologies)”. It includes the following description as part of a new course: “It promotes discussion and analysis of the ways in which science has been used to support the dominance of Eurocentric views (among which, its use as a rationale for colonisation of Māori and the suppression of Māori knowledge); and the notion that science is a Western European invention and itself evidence of European dominance over Māori and other indigenous peoples.”

This perpetuates disturbing misunderstandings of science emerging at all levels of education and in science funding. These encourage mistrust of science. Science is universal, not especially Western European. It has origins in ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, ancient Greece and later India, with significant contributions in mathematics, astronomy and physics from mediaeval Islam, before developing in Europe and later the US, with a strong presence across Asia.

Science itself does not colonise. It has been used to aid colonisation, as have literature and art. However, science also provides immense good, as well as greatly enhanced understanding of the world. Science is helping us battle worldwide crises

such as Covid, global warming, carbon pollution, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. Such science is informed by the united efforts of many nations and cultures. We increasingly depend on science, perhaps for our very survival. The future of our world, and our species, cannot afford mistrust of science.

Indigenous knowledge is critical for the preservation and perpetuation of culture and local practices, and plays key roles in management and policy. However, in the discovery of empirical, universal truths, it falls far short of what we can define as science itself.

To accept it as the equivalent of science is to patronise and fail indigenous populations; better to ensure that everyone participates in the world's scientific enterprises. Indigenous knowledge may indeed help advance scientific knowledge in some ways, but it is not science.

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#### **GP SHORTAGES**

One way the Government could immediately address the GP shortage (“Burnout”, July 24) is to work with the Medical Council of New Zealand to fast-track foreign-doctor registration, which is apparently outrageously difficult and takes a ridiculously long time.

#### **C Johnstone**

*(Auckland)*

I know of three overseas-trained doctors who are working in other jobs. When I asked one (a rest-home carer) why he had not gone through the processes required to register here, he said he had to earn a living for his family and could not afford the fees and loss of paid working time.

Surely we could set up a scheme whereby we retrained and assessed these doctors while paying them a salary? We could then bond them to work as GPs (or as hospital doctors) for a set term. Any who failed the assessment would obviously be a cost to the system, but that would be offset by the benefits from those who succeeded.

I am also interested in the example set by the Fred

Hollows Foundation. In this country, cataract operations are done by doctors with full medical training, but is it necessary to understand the anatomy of limbs, for example, to operate on a cataract? Maybe we should be training highly specialised technicians to do a lot of the jobs that doctors now do, releasing doctors to diagnose and treat patients whose needs are less clear.

#### **Carol Dossor**

*(Napier)*

A good GP is a wonderful resource, but the decline in number and availability is now long-standing and unlikely to change even if another medical school were to be created.

Nurse practitioners are experienced registered nurses with an additional master's degree who are legally able to deliver exactly the same diagnostic, prescribing, referral and management of presenting conditions as a GP. This country has well over 500, some of whom have been in their position for 20 years.

Importantly, nurses are the only profession who remain well distributed throughout the country, and so with a relatively small investment could become nurse practitioners in the rural areas and small towns in which the shortage is being felt most keenly.

#### **Letters to the editor** {[listenerletters@aremedia.co.nz](mailto:listenerletters@aremedia.co.nz)}

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- A **writer's full residential address** is required on all letters, including emails.

- A phone number can be helpful.
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