



**PASIFIKA**  
MEDICAL ASSOCIATION  
GROUP

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

19 June 2018

### **Pasifika Medical Association Charity Ball & Auction – Launch**

An organisation which has spent more than twenty years fostering and championing excellence in healthcare services to Pacific peoples, encouraging and mentoring Pacific people to become health care workers and training and organising Pacific based people to help out with relief work when disaster strikes, is about to step up its efforts even more.

The Association has established an education fund that will provide study awards to top performing secondary and tertiary students focused on a career in health. It will provide an opportunity for a Pacific Doctor or a Pacific Nurse to undertake an international short course and study tour.

The Pasifika Medical association (PMA) will launch its fund raising effort at a Charity Ball and Auction at the Cordis Hotel in Auckland on the 20th of July. It's hoping to attract up to 500 people to the gala event which will involve Pacific heroes and icons like Sir Michael Jones and Dame Valerie Adams.

The PMA has an impressive record of development and delivery of health services to Pacific people both in New Zealand and in the Pacific dating back more than two decades.

In the early and mid-1980s there wasn't one Pacific primary health care provider in South Auckland, the area of New Zealand where most Pacific people lived. The first to open was West Fono in West Auckland in 1989; and while people of Pacific Island descent made up 7% of the New Zealand population, they made up less than 2% of healthcare workers.

In 1996 the PMA was formed as an Incorporated Society to provide a forum for Pacific medical professionals including doctors, medical students and other health professionals. They held their first conference a year later in Auckland and Aiono Associate Professor Alec Ekeroma was the first president.

By the following year they had persuaded the government to establish The Pacific Provider Development Fund to establish 'By Pacific, For Pacific' health providers.

A year later in 1999 saw the establishment of South Seas Healthcare in Otara.

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In 2001, the PMA annual conference was held outside of New Zealand for the first time in the Cook Islands where Dr Ate Moala became President.

2002 was a milestone year for Pacific health professionals. The conference moved back to Auckland and introduced the PMA Service Awards which have since become an annual event.

There was cause for celebration too that by then 14 Pacific health providers had been set up funded by the Ministry of Health Provider Fund. 75% of the patients of the new organisations were Pacific people.

The new President was Dr Colin Tukuitonga; who after a stint with the World Health Organisation has gone on to head the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC), as Director General based in Noumea.

In 2005 the annual conference moved offshore again, this time to Tonga. And that year PMAs services expanded again when it was contracted to provide more than \$2m worth of support services to Professional Pacific Organisations.

By 2008 from its humble beginnings just over a decade earlier, PMAs membership had risen to more than 500 health professionals.

In 2009 when the conference again returned to the Cook Islands PMA showing growing confidence appointed its first CEO – Debbie Sorenson – and the organisation stepped up once again becoming responsible for Pacific Health Dialogue. On a very hands on practical front PMA helps to co-ordinate New Zealand's disaster relief following the tsunami that struck Samoa.

By that year too there were 39 Pacific health providers receiving Pacific Provider Development Funding and delivering \$50m worth of health services.

By 2016, twenty years after its formation the Pacific Medical Association membership reaches 3000.

CEO Debbie Sorenson says, "It's actually breath-taking looking back over the 22 years since PMA was formed, where the organisation came from, and how it's developed. From the simple idea to provide a forum where the then very few Pacific health workers could meet and share their ideas, hopes and aspirations to the organisation we have today; which is really the 'go-to' place when you want

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to talk about or do anything in the Pasifika health area – it has been a remarkable and humbling journey.”

“We have grown our number of health professional members from almost nothing to more than 3000. The mentoring and training we have facilitated not just for regular and normal health services, but also training people for disaster relief in some of our distant islands has been very satisfying and a source of pride too for the people on the ground on those islands that they can be the first responders for their people and community.”

“Now as in the past we want to take another step up. That’s why we’re launching this project to raise funds this year so we can continue to build on this work and to encourage and support Pacific Doctors and Nurses to develop their careers so they can better serve their communities”.

“I know the Charity Ball and Auction will be a fun night. It’ll be a chance to reflect on where PMA has been and how we’ve performed over the past twenty years, and a chance to push ahead again. We hope you can join us.”

There are 500 tickets available for the dinner and ball. They can be purchased through the PMA website - <http://pacifichealth.org.nz/charity-ball-2018/> and you can contact Melissa Fidow E: [melissa@pacifichealth.org.nz](mailto:melissa@pacifichealth.org.nz) for more information.

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