

Faculty of Pain Medicine appoints Samoan health leader to vice dean role

Auckland-based specialist pain medicine physician Fuimaono Dr Leinani Aiono-Le-Tagaloa has become the first Indigenous woman to be elected vice dean of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists' (ANZCA) Faculty of Pain Medicine.

Dr Aiono-Le-Tagaloa, who is Samoan, said while she was "shocked" at being voted into the role by her colleagues, she was excited to step up into the new position.

"I am happy and excited, but I feel very much like I've got a lot of learning to do."

The faculty is responsible for the training, examination and continuing education of specialist pain medicine physicians (fellows) and for the standards of clinical practice for pain medicine in Australia and New Zealand.

Dr Aiono-Le-Tagaloa, who is also an anaesthetist, said she spoke to her father after being nominated.

"In Samoan tradition, when someone honours you, you do not refuse it.

"He reminded me of our custom, and said 'someone has given you this honour; do not dishonour them, you accept the nomination.'"

She began her medical education at Otago University, but also completed an obstetric anaesthesia fellowship at Stanford University in the United States, before returning to New Zealand.

Dr Aiono-Le-Tagaloa said her career journey had not been an easy one, but she was now hoping to make a difference.

"As a woman of colour, I would love to be able to lend my voice to (ANZCA's) Reconciliation Action Plan, to be able to increase the faculty's presence in that area, to increase the number of fellows of First Nations origin in particular, and of Māori, and improve and strengthen the relationship with Pacific peoples."

She also aims to be a strong advocate for all of the faculty's fellows.

Dr Aiono-Le-Tagaloa said practicing pain medicine was a unique challenge.

"Pain medicine strips you back to the most vulnerable place as a physician because you do not have the ability to provide a concrete solution for their distress; I can't just prescribe something that will take the pain away. But you get to validate someone and stand with them; witness their story and walk with them on a journey that is extremely hard. Because you haven't got a quick fix it challenges, exposes and strengthens you as a physician.

"When we've been able to do that, I've had the intense satisfaction of watching people reclaim their lives."

She was grateful for the support of her mentors and colleagues throughout her career, as well as her family and ancestors.

"We have a saying in my language that I cherish; the essence of it is that the prayers of those who back and support a warrior are of equal value to their physical strength and training. It is my name

on the nomination, but the credit goes to those who have lent their *tapuai*, their thoughts and prayers, and those who have believed in me.

“So, to my parents, my siblings, my family and my Pacific community, faafetai tele lava! And to my Faculty of Pain family; o lau pule lea. It is all of you that I carry.”

Dr Aiono-Le-Tagaloa’s election was confirmed this week at the 2024 ANZCA Annual Scientific Meeting, held in Brisbane.

For more information, please contact ANZCA Senior Communications Advisor – New Zealand, Reon Suddaby, on +64 21 228 8072 or rsuddaby@anzca.org.nz