

# Keri Ratima



## 1. Where did you grow up?

I was born in Whakatane, but we moved to Invercargill when I was quite young. My father went down from the Bay of Plenty to work in the freezing works.

## 2. What was medical school like for you?

It was pretty hard! There were few Māori in my class when I went to medical school. Tiwini Hemi was my main Māori support person in my year. Debbie Ryan was a Samoan woman who was also a fantastic support.

## 3. Did they have the MAPAS-like scheme going when you were down in Dunedin?

Yes they did, but it wasn't operating very well. There were very few Māori and Pacific Island students across all the years of medical school at that time. Vaughan Douglas and a few of the other older ones weren't in our class but they were really supportive. Te Rōpū Māori, the Otago University Māori student group was also really supportive for us. There were few Māori at University and everyone tended to band together.

## 4. What influenced you to become a GP then?

Probably my father and my uncle. My uncle was an orthopaedic surgeon. He had big BMW's, swimming pool etc!!! Really though, my father and my mother were very committed to getting all of us (kids) educated. My mother was a nurse. My father was very active in the Māori community and a Ringatu Minister as well. I saw a lot of traditional Māori healing as a child, and was fascinated by the stories that I heard and what I saw. Particularly the spiritual healing. So with those two parents, it seems natural to develop an interest in Māori health.

When I was 9, I decided I wanted to become a doctor. It wasn't because of the hours that I chose to become a GP, because I was doing rural GP work, which tends to be really time consuming. It was the opportunity to live at home (in Opotiki) and to be a real part of the community at home.

I went into general practice under the guidance of Peter Jansen. He was really encouraging and helpful, and he gave me the confidence to just go out and do general practice. He made it seem achievable. He was in the GP practice that I went into for about 3-5 years. So I went straight from my house surgeon years and went

to do general practice with him. Him and his brother Dave (Jansen) saying “come and do general practice, you can come and work here with Peter” made it seem not quite so scary!!

**5. Are there any particular role models that you feel have influenced your career?**

There would be Peter, Jacqueline Allen, and Pat Ngata. I went and did my Elective in Te Puia Springs as a TI and met Pat while he was doing general practice in Gisborne, around 1990. This was before he moved up to Tolaga Bay. So I worked with him, and Jan Bryant, and saw what Peter was doing too.

**6. What were the hard parts for you working as a GP?**

All the on-call in rural areas. You can't drink, and you can't go anywhere, and you have to get people to look after the kids all the time, over weekends etc when you are on-call. I got tired of that after a few years. Those things are just what you have to do when you're on-call though. We had about a one-in-four roster.

**7. What are the good parts then?**

Getting to know the community and the people, and everyone knows who you are. People really look after you. I got a lot of fish!! Kina, paua and crayfish were other good parts of being a doctor at home.

Even things like going to the service station, and your young patients rush out to fill up your car. You go to the school and the teachers are nice to you. You get treated really well in a small community. Generally speaking they still really value their doctors there (even if they don't generally follow the doctors good advice!!).

The relationships that I developed over the years that I was there were probably the best part. Going from diagnosing a pregnancy to 6 week checks and all of that right through until some of “my babies” were getting ready to go to school. Looking after people at the other end of their life can be very humbling, and you really get to know people and their families through that type of caring work. It involves a lot of close communication and home visits, terminal care. I remained caring for the families of those who died as well. A special bond develops between me and them.

**8. Is there anything that you feel the government could do to enable more doctors to work as rural GPs?**

Locum or relievers schemes, because sometimes it can be hard to get away on holiday. What they are doing now is rotating house-surgeons through so they can see all the good points about being a rural GP, and that it's such a beautiful place to live, not like living in a big city, you can walk across the road to the beach and the living expenses are cheap.

**9. You're working with the National Health Committee now.**

Yes, I've just gone into the public health registrar training program, and am doing a position which is a Senior Advisor in Māori Health working with the National Health Committee, which is an independent advisory group to the Minister of Health.

**10. What caused you to change out of general practice?**

I only work 4 days a week with my current position, and that really suits me with my kids.

**11. Is there any particular times that would advise people to have kids?**

I wouldn't want to advise anyone on that! For me personally Medical School was a good time. Now that I am working they're all at school, and I've got free childcare! It

is hard to study and have children, but I can't imagine what it would be like to have a baby or a small child when you're a house-surgeon or registrar.

**12. Any particular advice you would give to people considering becoming a GP?**

Look for some Māori doctors to work with, so you can work in a supportive environment. It made such a difference working with Peter when I was doing my Primex exam (entry exam into the College of GP's).

Ngāti Porou Hauora is really supportive too. If you go and work there you can get a free house, get a free car to use while you are there, and have study groups. I heard that all of the Māori doctors there who sat the exam last year passed. Fantastic! It means you can save more money too, or pay back some of that student loan.