

A Symposium on Health Equity and the Social Determinants of Health

The Auckland Supercity and Future Health Equity Symposium

Address by NZMA Chair Dr Paul Ockelford

Tuesday 12 July 2011, University of Auckland, Tamaki Innovation Campus

Professor Marmot, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

The NZMA as the pre-eminent pan-professional medical organisation in NZ aspires to leadership in medicine, BY PROMOTING PROFESSIONAL UNITY, PROFESSIONAL VALUES and THE HEALTH OF ALL NZers.

As part of our 125th anniversary year events the NZMA Board undertook to develop a position statement on health equity.

This decision, in large part, was based on the inspiring and groundbreaking work of Professor Marmot, so it is a great privilege to have him at this event today and to hear him speak about his many years of research and advocacy to address the social determinants of health.

About a year ago, the NZMA Board formed a Health Equity Sub-committee. The subcommittee's first major task was to develop a position statement that would comprehensively encompass the social factors that impact on health, and health inequities, in our own community and to look at the actions we need to undertake to reduce inequities.

The call for action was very much to New Zealand as a whole – to involve not only Government and doctors, but also the wider health sector, civil society and professional groups.

Since we published our position statement, it has been heartening to have the endorsement and support of so many organisations. Today's impressive attendance, and the many organisations that will also be represented at tomorrow's symposium in Wellington, illustrates that there is widespread interest in this issue and an understanding and acceptance that we need a 'whole of government', 'whole of society' approach if we are to meet the huge challenge of reducing health inequities.

We all want a fair, equitable society where people can meet their full potential and not be impeded by ill health that maybe largely preventable, due to poor quality housing, lack of education or inadequate nutrition to name just some.

The next step is to evaluate all the research and knowledge we have, from both New Zealand and overseas (including Professor Marmot's WHO Commission report and the Marmot Review) and to find the way forward in terms of policies and effective strategies that will result in improving the lives of our most vulnerable groups.

We anticipate that the two symposia we are holding will foster constructive dialogue and debate on the actions we need to undertake to make the biggest possible difference – these actions are highlighted in today's conference pack and are an excellent basis for discussion. Ultimately we want to achieve a vision for greater health equity into the future through an ongoing and concerted effort to implement policies that will make a real and discernable difference. On a very positive note we have an excellent scientific base, through many years of research and looking at 'what works,' to help us as we move forward.

I thank participants today for joining us in showing an interest and commitment to this issue.

The NZMA in developing this initiative is seeking solutions and commonality, not to highlight OR sensationalise differences; we are hoping to raise awareness, AND see longterm evidence based solutions in context BUT NOT TO POLITICISE the debates-although others may clearly wish to do so.

The conflict will not be in the direction towards ensuring all members of society achieve their health potential, but HOW this is best achieved.