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Dr Maurice Matich (Snr)
19 February 1922–24 August 2015
OBE MBChB FRNZCGP

Maurice Matich (Snr) died peacefully at his Dargaville home on 24 August, 2015, in his 94th year.

He was born in Dargaville, the son of Croatian immigrants, and brought up on the shores of the Kaipara harbour at a bay now known locally as Matich’s Bay.

He often attributed his longevity to an early diet of fresh Kaipara mullet and snapper, and oysters from Beacon Point.

He trained at Otago Medical School, qualifying in 1946. He was the first graduate of Croatian heritage to come out of Otago. His ability to speak Croatian came in handy over the years, as many of the old Croatian gum-digging families settled in the Dargaville district.

He initially intended to get his Fellowship in Obstetrics in England, but having met and married Maureen, and with the Cold War worsening, he returned to Dargaville and the surrounding area to work as a GP. He remained in the Dargaville district for the next 50 years, retiring in 2000. He delivered several thousand babies during his time.

He became interested in medical politics, becoming Chairman of the Medical Association in 1974–75. He was involved in negotiating favourable GP fees for the newly developed Accident Compensation Corporation, his mantra always being, “I don’t care who pays me, so long as it is enough!!”

In 1975 he was appointed to the Royal Commission into Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion whose 1977 report led to the Contraception, Sterilisation and Abortion Act.

In the late 60s he also set up an innovative GP Group Practice in Dargaville with the late Drs Neville Hogg and Phil Barham. The present Dargaville Medical Centre is a continuation of this.

He was held in high regard by local Māori, overseeing the transition from mud-floored huts at Kaihu and further south at Repia to proper homes in the late 50s and early 60s. He often said that health was more than medicine, and encompassed many things, such as good housing and sanitation. He was instrumental in setting up satellite clinics in the surrounding areas, including diabetes clinics to help improve Māori health.

He is considered a Rangatira of the Pouto marae and his photo will sit there alongside the other elders.

In his spare time, he enjoyed farming on the family farm at Mangatara, just outside of Dargaville, and his children recount great times spent there planting pine trees and burning swamp kauri—the value of which not being appreciated at the time.

He himself suffered life-threatening fractured ribs whilst bulldozing trees on the farm. The young doctor who assessed him at Whangarei Hospital had difficulty understanding what a GP was doing on a bulldozer!

He played bowls and golf, attaining high standards in each, but his main joy was time spent fishing and mucking around on
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the Kaipara Harbour. Children and grandchildren were taught to swim, fish, water ski, chase stingrays and dolphins, and sail. They remember with much affection the kauri launch Swanee on which many a good time was had.

He is survived by his wife Maureen, and his children Visko (England), Maurice (Western Australia), Stephanie (Wellington), Siobhan (Auckland), Michaela (Whangarei), Damian (England) and Amanda (Dargaville).

Author information:
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