

Presentation to the 3rd International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference

14-16 June 2023. Cairns. Australia

Date: Wednesday, 14 June 2023.

Stream: Living a Good Life

Room: M6

Time: 4.20 pm

Presenter: Donna Kerridge (Whakauae Research Services)

Title: Rongoā is not a CAM.

Greetings and acknowledgement to the first nations peoples of this land. Those that have walked this land the longest, who have learned to live with and care for this land and to hear her when she speaks. Those who have so warmly welcomed us this day, to their home.

Greetings to all from the four corners of the world

Tēnā koutou katoa

Ko Taupiri te maunga

Ko Waikato te awa

Ko Waikato te iwi

Ko Ngāti Tahinga me Ngāti Mahuta ōku hapū

Ko Donna Kerridge tōku ingoa

No reira tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā tātou katoa

My name is Donna Kerridge

My ancestors hail from the Waikato tribe in Aotearoa, the north of England and beyond. I am a Rongoā Māori practitioner of 20 plus years' experience. My interests are the care and protection of Rongoā Māori as a treasure for improving health outcomes for all people and especially our indigenous. I am a full-time advocate for Rongoā and a part time researcher for Whakauae Research Services, on the Te Ao Rauropi HRC funded Project (Mapping the Biosphere of Rongoā). Rongoā Māori is our indigenous wellbeing system. It is a tool for reconnecting our people to the natural world and each other and the gifts that we each bring to the world.

Indigenous Knowledge – is acute observations of natural phenomena in an ever-changing world. It is the knowledge of the land from the people who belong to the land. It is the result of their interaction with the land over many generations. It is the knowledge they have accumulated by living on the land, working with the land, harvesting from the land, all the time listening, watching, and caring, to ensure we can hear Papatūānuku when she speaks to us, so that we might be well alongside our siblings in the natural world.

Rongoā Māori is not a Complementary Alternative Medicine, a Natural Health Product and nor is it green pharmacy or Māori massage. It is oldest wellbeing practice in Aotearoa. Rongoā

Māori is a tool that can improve health equity. It is a way of knowing, doing and being Māori, that strives to improve individual and collective wellbeing through the restoration of balance and reciprocity. It encompasses principles of wairua, mauri and manaaki. Nothing exists in isolation; accordingly, nothing heals in isolation.

Speakers at the Tū Mai Rongoā Māori Symposium this time last year, organised by Whakauae Research Services that attracted more than 1,000 registrations, made it clear that current legislation:

- is racist and privileges western models of care and values over 1st nations ways of understanding the world;
- our laws criminalise Rongoā Māori as practiced today and oversteps the Crown rights by attempting to control through regulation taonga Māori;
- proposed new legislation will increase cost and reduce access to rongoā (as warned by our own health officials in their regulatory Impact Statement May 2021);
- the cost of perpetuating and further alienating Māori interests, through law, is a luxury the Crown can no longer afford. The Waitangi Tribunal have already signalled that Crown attempts to regulate Rongoā Māori in a way opposed by Māori would be a matter of 'real concern to the Tribunal'.¹

And yet, successive Governments allow companies to falsely label some health supplements as 'natural' when they are not. While they may be chemically identical, they were not created by nature. And yet in Aotearoa, we have laws that prevent our indigenous from speaking the truth and declaring that certain remedies 'were traditionally used by their ancestors'. How can laws outlaw the truth? and, the scheduling of important healing plants so that only our medical doctors can use or prescribe them, despite being the least qualified profession to do so.

There is no denying we have a health system that is in dire straits. We have a rapidly growing demand on our health services and reduced access to healthcare. This is a result of:

- increased global competition for our health professionals
- a maturing and burnt-out domestic resource pool
- unprecedented attrition rates and,
- the competing and urgent financial demands of addressing the impacts of climate change.

Our urgent health response in Aotearoa is the Therapeutic Products Bill (a category 5 priority on the Parliament Legislation programme) is to regulate Natural Health products and further control all other forms of healing outside a western model of health care. Despite all of this, the eventual requirement for the Crown to honour its Treaty obligations, might be the very thing that saves us from ourselves, in this instance.

Our indigenous have a significant role to play in helping to improve health outcomes for the people of Aotearoa. Trust in the ability of our current health system to meet the urgent needs

¹ Interim Report of the Waitangi Tribunal in Respect of the ANZTPA Regime (2006) p.2

of our population is at an all-time low and reflective of challenges Governments around the world are facing today.

The Crown has an important role to play in helping to resolve the health issues we face today. Instead of using new legislation as a tool to regulate or control other forms of healing by further privileging Western medicine priorities and values, we can use legislation as a tool to help support a health system in crisis by recognising, stimulating, and enabling indigenous forms of healing.

The economic reality of the current situation is that if demands on our health services continue to rapidly increase and our ability to meet that demand continues to decrease, costs will increase generating a downward spiral and national health crisis.

With timely access to healthcare declining, we are creating a bottleneck for other Government wellbeing aspirations including those associated with education, social services and law and order.

1 year's seeding will lead to 7 years weeding. There is no ignoring that fact.

None of us want to be seeding poorer health outcomes on our watch.

It is an economic and moral imperative that we broaden access to different ways of addressing this urgent task.

We cannot ignore the opportunity we have right now to recognise and empower Indigenous Health practices.

A significant focus of successive Governments has been about growing trade at any cost, succumbing to the growing international protectionism of the global health industry (rather than service). In desperation lobbyists and Governments are turning up the pressure to control what some might call Green Pharmacy and Indigenous Health practices.

These Governments fail to offer new solutions to address our health crisis, in fact they feed the opposite. All I see in the indigenous space is more Crown intervention in a space they have no expertise in. And a total avoidance of anything that might speak to indigenous rights.

The Crown can:

1. **Can continue to ignore us** but we will not go away. Rongoā is not a vocation choice for me, it is an obligation to my ancestors, my teachers, those yet to be born and the care and wellbeing of our precious land.
2. **Or they can attempt to regulate Rongoā Māori and other indigenous health practices** – and this will most definitely result in an urgent national Waitangi Tribunal request for a breach of Māori Treaty rights potentially delaying enactment.
3. **Or the Crown can embrace us** – and empower us to help address the health crisis we all find ourselves in.

I am not ignoring the amazing good modern medicine does, merely illustrating that regulation does not deliver better health outcomes for wellbeing practices that are already statistically

safe. In fact, the greatest threat to Rongoā Māori and consumer safety, is Crown intervention and exploitation of practices they have no expertise or authority in. To impose Western Tikanga over tikanga Māori would only increase risk to consumers and practitioners alike. It is in our diversity that we bring our respective gifts to address the urgent needs of our public health system.

The only reason rongoā even exists today is because it works!

Please don't try to fix it! And *give effect to that which is Right and Just for all people.*
Rongoā is NOT a CAM!

No reira tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa!

Donna Kerridge,

Rongoā Practitioner and Kaupapa Māori Researcher

Whakauae Research Services

www.whakauae.co.nz