

NZIMLS Aug 31st 2022 Presidents address ASM Wellington

Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou, Tēnā koutou katoa

Today is a momentous day in a long journey. This is the first time I have stood up in front of you on home soil at an Annual Scientific meeting since August 2018. To put this in perspective I have had the absolute honour to be the longest serving president in the 76 year history of the NZIMLS and this is only the 2nd time I have opened an ASM. It is fair to say that the past few years has been the most defining but also challenging period in our history.

In 2017 the Institute executive with the blessing of the full council embarked on a new direction for our professional body. Things clearly had to change with the evolving health environment and where exactly the Institute role should fit in. One of the worrying aspects at that time was the influence of external and non-health drivers starting to dominate and suppress our ability to grow and enhance our profession. Decisions at the health governance and legislation level were being made on grounds with little appreciation for long term sustainability of our professional role and wider workforce stability.

I remember at that time after we had written our first comprehensive Briefing to the Incoming Health Minister David Clark thinking that it would take at least 5 years of intensive lobbying to start to see genuine positive changes for the betterment of the medical laboratory science profession. That was a heck of a commitment and I knew that to see this through it was going to be a difficult road and almost certainly would have a major effect on all parts of my work and personal life. We all know that medical scientists had virtually no political or public profile and our plight was in a queue so far behind that for Doctors and Nurses that getting any traction would be impossible without a change of

fate.....however along comes a global pandemic and the rest is history.

Sitting in David Clarks electorate office back in early 2018 I was bemoaning the lack of voice that our profession had in any decisions that had major effects on workforce and career stability. David, said 'Terry, we are about to embark on a full independent review of the entire health system, and we expect your profession to be part of this process'. And so that journey started and our significant input continues to this day. I have boxes of position papers, briefings, interview notes, and even government papers that have to be seen to be believed from the past 4 years. We have had correspondence, zooms, and in person meetings with all of the leaders of the reforms, other MOH leaders and Health Ministers plus any other politicians, media and sector leaders who would listen to us.

I zoomed in for the official unveiling of Te Whatu Ora (Health NZ) and Te Aka Whai Ora (Māori Health Authority) and the national Public Health Agency on July 1st. I was incredibly proud to see this come to life as a living breathing result of the work of so many amazing people including your own NZIMLS executive. To hear the opening statements with Doctors, Nurses, and Scientists as the pillars of the health system says it all for as far as we have come. I know many probably missed the significance of that statement, I most certainly did not.

The pandemic in a way provided a perfect storm for showcasing our value to the health system and the country as a whole. As the Prime Minister the Right Hon Jacinda Ardern passed onto us in an email from her office when she couldn't attend today, our profession was front and centre as a vital cog in the team of 5 million and she pledged her heartfelt thanks to the essential role we continue to have in all health outcomes. I have lost count of the thankyou letters and letters of positive intent we continue to get from politicians, health leaders and the general public. I have even had Deb Fabrin a

renown NZ watercolour artist paint my portrait which was a major surprise. Unfortunately with the good sometimes we get the bad, it hasn't always been smooth sailing and the personal toll on our executive and office has been at times intense and the attacks an unwanted side-effect of being public both within our profession and at a national level. I reiterate we are volunteers with the heart of the profession as our priority and I personally stand by everything we have said and done even if our vision clashed with other philosophies and views. That is however not an excuse for some of the poor professional behaviour that our body and regulatory organisations have had to deal with over the past year.

To change to more positives, we have had personal assurances from political and health leadership that under Te Whatu Ora governance measured priorities will be aligned to workforce stability and wellbeing, further education and professional development. Career progression will be real and based on education, experience, and expertise and the expectation is that it will be independently assessed to remove the inherent bias that many have experienced. Under Te Whatu Ora leadership and governance these are real commitments and will begin to be incorporated within the NZ Health Charter (Te Mauri o Rango) and the government health plan over the next few years. My biggest personal disappointment is that we have had to highlight and lobby for all of this in the first instance

Doors are now being opened and pathways are being created right now that were only ever dreams before. These opportunities will need to be taken by our best and brightest and our current laboratory mindset and staff approaches will need to change with this. Those that sit back and think we can continue with our current situation are in for a massive disappointment and a huge shock. The move to a fully integrated and coordinated approach to pathology services is happening under our eyes right now but don't ever forget that we are the guardians of our own destiny now. No more sitting in

the background and putting up with what you have seen previously seen erode your profession and your ability to thrive. Take ownership of why we are medical laboratory practitioners and question poor decisions, suppressive leadership constraints, and detrimental service management. As you will see on the bottom of my email signature.

“A scientist is not the one who gives the right answers but is the one who asks the right questions”

In saying all of that, I feel privileged and humbled by the many leadership, advisory and working groups we have been personally invited onto on the back of leading such a talented but untapped group of health professionals. I am so proud to work alongside you all and the small things that my close colleagues have done for me when they have sensed the burden I carry are what pushes me harder to break down the big stuff for them. I have a big mouth and a bigger heart and trust me when I say I still have a bit left to give and a lot more to achieve yet.

I want to personally thank everyone who has supported and encouraged the Institute over the past few years, and also those who challenged us. It is actually easy to promote our amazing frontline workforce, we after all know just how dam good we are at our front line jobs. It was always just a matter of getting that opening to be able to show and communicate it. I assure you all, while the Institute has the ear of the leadership, positive intent for workforce stability and service equity will be front and centre and our new normal will be a better place for all practitioners.

The work of the executive Mary-Ann Janssen, Tony Barnett and Sharon Tozer, plus our academic advisor Mike Legge has been the critical glue that has kept things on track. Endless zooms, documents and correspondence has been everyone’s new evening and weekend normal. An unseen role is the enduring support we have provided to

each other. We have all had difficult and mentally taxing periods but being able to talk openly and honestly as a group has been critical to staying on track. The whole NZIMLS council have had to adjust to a quite different normal than they signed up for.

Thankyou, thankyou so much, we are all a great team whom I feel honoured to be part of.

And on that vein in the words of John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK).....We didn't do this because it was going to be easy, we did it because it was going to be hard, **and it bloody well has been!**

Tēnā tātōa, Mā te wā, Kia kaha