

INVITED FEATURE: NZMSA REVIEW

NZMSA President Report

Indira Fernando

Kia ora! Ko Indira Fernando toku ingoa. I am the outgoing 2024 New Zealand Medical Students' Association (NZMSA) President, and it has been my privilege to serve the NSMSA for the past four years.

The NZMSA is the national medical student representative body in Aotearoa, advocating on behalf of all medical students across the country. In 2024, we've been busy creating amazing events, pushing for important system changes, and working with our partner organisations to enhance the experience of our members while at medical school and beyond.

Our largest event of the year was the NZMSA Annual Conference, IGNITE, hosted at Parliament in Pōneke. It was an incredible event with a wide range of fantastic speakers including Dr Ayesha Verral and Dr Shane Reti. Students learnt about the structure and governance of the current health system from the day-to-day clinical level to national and international management. They had the opportunity to seek advice from leaders in clinical medicine, research, and policy, on how they can ignite the change they wish to see. The event also featured multiple social events, providing opportunities to mix and mingle across year levels and sites. This massive event could not have been completed without the tireless mahi of both the NZMSA conference team, as well as the NZMSA executive members.

Other important events included the Medical Leadership Forum in Nelson, where students gained insights into the challenges and rewards of rural medicine and learned about applying medical knowledge in smaller, high needs settings. The Student Research Forum in Tāmāki Makaurau, in collaboration with the New Zealand Medical Student Journal, was a brilliant opportunity for students to experience presenting their research, as well as hear from experts in the field of academics on how to maximise the impact of their own work on the medical field.

Preparing our taura to enter the workforce has always been an important part of NZMSA's mahi. To do this, we continued several initiatives from previous years including our Guide to Gradation series and Beyond the Medical School Gates seminar. Guide to Graduation provides written advice on making the transition from the fifth year of medical school to being a trainee intern (TI), and then on to being a first-year doctor. Beyond the Medical School Gates provides students with an opportunity to hear from post-graduate year 1's and 2's (PGY1 and PGY2), receive advice regarding information doctors wish they had known when starting work, and from important groups such as the unions and Te Whatu Ora.

Advocacy has always been an important part of NZMSA's mahi. We have continued to push for better conditions for medical students including an increase in the TI Grant, better employment opportunities for all New Zealand graduates, and meaningful change to address inequity and discrimination. This mahi involved liaising with many external partners including Te Whatu Ora, the Ministry of Health, the Royal Medical Colleges, and the New Zealand Medical Council. NZM-

SA has also had the opportunity to collaborate with our partners at Te Oranga to create a report on the experiences of taurira Māori in clinical settings and compile recommendations on changes needed to empower these students. The report was presented to the Council of Medical Colleges to allow them to promote change through their trainees and fellows.

NZMSA is a volunteer-run charity entirely manned by current taurira rata. Our mahi takes a huge amount of time and effort. These people juggle busy lives as medical students with the enormous workload and demand placed on them by these volunteer roles. It is a true testament to their dedication to their peers that, despite all of this, they continue to put in so much effort into their portfolios. My greatest pleasure this year has been working with so many passionate representatives and advocates to work towards creating real change for our students.

Most of us don't see the work that goes into representing students on a national level. The countless meetings, the long reports, and the pressure from both external parties and your own peers to always be doing more. Compounding that is the fact that much of the change we are pushing for takes time, more time than many of us have during medical school. Rarely do representatives get to enjoy the fruits of their labour; however, they continue to work towards these shared goals regardless, passing on their experience and knowledge to the next group of advocates in the hopes that, eventually, these goals will be realised.

As I prepare to graduate myself, I can confidently say that working with these hardworking individuals has been the highlight of my medical school journey. For anyone thinking about getting involved, I highly encourage you to do so. Joining the executive team of NZMSA provides an opportunity to have your voice heard on a national level, and to influence policy and initiatives that affect all New Zealanders. If you believe that things can and should be better, this is your chance to help make that change. Whether you feel called to this mahi or not, I hope you will join me in thanking your local and national representatives and executives, who work tirelessly to represent us as medical students.

About the author

> Indira Fernando (they/them) is the outgoing 2024 President of the New Zealand Medical Students Association. They have served as a student advocate for 5 years across many organisations including NZMSA, OUMSA, and ROMSA. They have a passion for equity and health reform and will be starting as a PGY1 in 2025.

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