

Book review

Bringing Culture into Care

A biography of Amohaere Tangitu

Category: Book Reviews / Māori, Non-Fiction

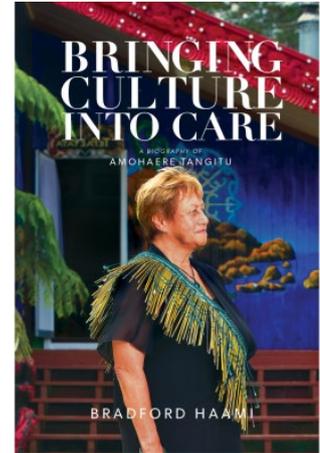
Author: Bradford Haami

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Summary: The journey of Amohaere Tangitu, who has changed the way health services serve the clinical, cultural and personal health needs of Māori and other health consumers.

It is a pleasure to review a biography of someone who you have worked with and is still alive, and who can reflect with joy, humility and courage on the journey she has travelled, which has evolved and in that process has changed the way health services in Auckland, Whakatane and the Bay of Plenty meet the clinical, cultural and personal health needs of Māori and other consumers of health care services. In her commitment to service Amohaere Tangitu has utilised her own personal values, beliefs, spirituality, and her whakapapa and whānaungatanga connections to bring about change. These are gifts she has used in her work to help others and establish her own career and personal integrity.

The journey of Amohaere Tangitu is well narrated by her and Bradford Haami, starting with her own family background, her marriage and experience of losing her babies, and the challenges of being alone in a new world: living in Auckland felt quite different to living on a farm at Otakiri in the Bay of Plenty. Her family background and upbringing provided the foundation for her development and the skills and personal attributes required for her to lead and navigate social and structural change in the health sector and in specific hospitals where she was called to work.

The release of this biography is timely, as health and wider social services are now being systematically reviewed. Firstly as to their adequacy in meeting New Zealanders' needs, and secondly how effectively are they meeting Māori individual, whānau, hapū and iwi needs. The various reviews released have included a national inquiry into the adequacy of Mental Health Services and Addictions, Ministerial Inquiry into State Care and Abuse, Review of the Family Court and Waitangi Tribunal Inquiry into Māori access, and availability and appropriate funding of primary health care and medical services.

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As health and social services are reliant on the constant educating and upskilling of staff, there is also a need to independently review tertiary education institutions to identify whether programs are culturally safe and are in alignment with changes that are occurring in populations and communities.

Personally, I really enjoyed reading the biography of Amohaere Tangitu as I could relate to her background. We are both daughters in a Māori family and whānau, who were fortunate to have had mothers who nurtured us and taught us by the way they lived their life – the importance of tikanga Māori in all matters. They also set high expectations for their children, in that they were expected to serve others in their work and to live their Māori values in all areas of their lives. Achieving change or growth was not possible alone, but by working with others and including people both within and outside of organisations, as well as through the involvement of kaumātua and kuia, whose wisdom would guide them in their work and spiritually protect them.

In summary, this biography is well written and documents the development of health services in Aotearoa from the 1980s to the end of the first decade of the new millennium. The book would be a useful resource for any student interested in the history of the development of health and disability services in New Zealand over the past three decades, and also for a wider audience in understanding Māori aspirations and expectations of Crown funded health services. The biography would also provide a great basis for a film of a remarkable woman whose shoulders many of us stand on today.

Reviewed by Lorna Dyall, QSM

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