



Prime Minister's
Supreme Award
and
Sustained Excellence
in Tertiary Teaching
General Category
and Excellence in
Supporting
Pacific Learners
Endorsement

Dr Latika Samalia

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“Teaching excellence doesn’t occur in isolation. I see it as a collaborative triangle between myself, my colleagues (teaching, research and support staff, clinicians and the research literature) and the students.”

Latika came to the Department of Anatomy after a career in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. For 28 years she has passed on her knowledge of anatomical structures and her clinical and professional skills to generations of health professionals at undergraduate and postgraduate levels at the University of Otago (UoO). Her aim is to be an educator with whom her students feel comfortable engaging. She believes in imparting knowledge in a safe, relaxed, undaunting environment while instilling appropriate knowledge, skills and confidence into her students. She works hard to make her students excited about the subject and believes if they have fun, they learn more. Using her experiences as a student, a clinician and a mother, she develops strong relationships with her students, encouraging them to fulfill their potential. She supports and challenges her students and enjoys being challenged by them. By learning with them, she can modify her delivery and content.

Samalia, who is Fijian, is the Pacific Island (PI) students’ support person in Anatomy for the School of Biomedical Sciences (BMS). She assists students academically and socially by attending all PI events and interacting with the PI students’ associations. She aims to instil in her PI students the confidence that they can do anything, be leading professionals and help their communities. Latika’s teaching has been recognised by her students and peers with awards since 1996. These include repeated awards from the Otago University Medical Students’ Association (OUMSA), as well as accolades from the Dental Students’ Association and the Health Sciences Division Award for contribution to development in the Pacific Region. She has also been awarded a BMS Distinguished Teaching Fellow Award (2015), Premier Lecturer, University Students Association (2018), and a University of Otago Teaching Excellence Award (2020). She often comes across former students, now doctors, dentists and physiotherapists in New Zealand hospitals, who remember anecdotes from her teaching.

Over many years, Latika has used her knowledge of anatomy and her understanding of how students learn to develop new and interesting ways to explain anatomy in a way that makes sense to students and helps them remember, understand and apply the knowledge. Making the learning environment less daunting and fun is important, especially since most of her classes involve human cadavers and dissection. Her medical class of 300 is composed of many different cultural backgrounds and each one has to be supported accordingly. Latika’s key strength is empathy – she has a friendly manner and always assures her students that they can and should ask for assistance.

Latika says Health Professional students are given a large amount of content which relates to future learning and clinical execution and which they need to remember easily and accurately. She finds innovative ways of delivering content that makes things real for students and encourages

them to engage, such as practical activities that connect to clinical work. For example, when second year medical students carry out knee joint aspiration on cadavers, she injects fluid into the joints prior to the lab so that students can experience the excitement of drawing actual fluid out. She uses mnemonics and analogies to help students remember body structures and, over ten years ago, introduced body painting into her teaching. Her students love this hands-on type of learning and the interaction with each other results in team-building, an important skill required for their future professions. As part of keeping up with new developments in anatomy, Latika introduced the use of ultrasound. Not only is ultrasound becoming a prominent technology for diagnoses in medicine, but it is a good teaching tool which has been adopted by other teachers in Anatomy. Students can master gross anatomy in the dissecting labs and then use ultrasound to see the structures live. Latika also uses simple models which she created with her departmental technician. She believes in having breaks in the lectures, when she either draws pictures, asks questions, or tells funny stories/anecdotes relevant to the topic. She also arranges breaks to run quizzes or allow students to palpate structures on themselves. When third year medical students wished to do more dissection, she set up a dissecting competition, run over a weekend, which proved to be of great benefit to both students and the department.

Having been involved in clinical practice, and having maintained close relationships with active clinicians and professional bodies, Latika keeps up-to-date with what is expected of clinical/professional graduates. Learnt from experience, she teaches respect, empathy and professionalism. By treating students in this way, she hopes that as professionals they will do the same with their patients and colleagues. She also ensures students are respectful toward cadavers, which are introduced as their first patient, and constantly reiterates instructions on the ethics of working with cadavers and patients. At the end of the year, classes hold a Thanksgiving Service for the donor families, which is much appreciated. Latika has created innovative ways of integrating assessment across multiple courses. As she is the convener for a number of papers in the second and third year medical course, a curriculum, which is integrated across other departments, she co-ordinates the various contributors to mark in one sitting. This ensures marking is completed together, is marked fairly as they discuss answers, is time efficient and highlights where the students are at collectively, informing future teaching and assessment.

One of Latika's most rewarding leadership activities has been mentoring the new Professional Practice Fellows (PPF) over the past 15 years and recruiting and mentoring the (up to 25) demonstrators in the department each year. She is also a member of the Body Ethics Committee, which assesses cadaveric use in research applications and has also served on the department's Teaching Management Committee. (Beyond the university, Latika maintains professional association through membership of, and conference contributions to, the Australia and New Zealand Association of Clinical Anatomists (ANZACA), the European Association of Clinical Anatomists/British Association of Clinical Anatomists (EACA / BACA) and the Medical Education Conference Association (MECA). In 2017, she was a founding member of the NZ Brain Tumour Trust (currently chair), and in 2019, a founding member of the Kotahitaka Charitable Trust in collaboration with the Dunedin Multi-Ethnic Council. She has published in academic journals such as *Anatomical Sciences Education*, *International Journal of Anatomical Variations* and *Australia and NZ Journal of Public Health* and is a current contributing chapter author in the Wiley textbook publication *Principles of Anatomy and Physiologyk-Asia Pacific Edition*.

"A teacher should be able to impart knowledge in a safe, relaxed, undaunting environment and yet be able to instil appropriate knowledge, skills and confidence into their students. I strive to carry out these qualities."

Dr Latika Samalia

Excellence in Supporting Pacific Learners Endorsement

Latika is the Pacific Island (PI) students' support person for the School of Biomedical Sciences (BMS), and also supports the Māori health professional students at the University of Otago (UoO). She has supported the Pacific Island Health Professional Students Association (PIHPSA) since the 1990s and is proud that Pacific student numbers at UoO have steadily increased, due to the support Pacific staff extend, be it pastoral, academic or simply mixing and meeting students. She makes herself accessible to answer questions, even if they are from a module which she does not teach. Her support of Pacific and Māori medical students includes developing a number of orientation sessions for dissections, as the head is a sensitive region for Māori and Pacific people. She liaised with the Māori and Pacific Centres and set up a cultural introduction in 2018, the 'Whakatupato', to clear the way for the 3rd year medical students to touch and dissect the head. This cultural clearance is not only important for the wellbeing of her students but allows her to feel more comfortable dissecting and teaching in this lab.

As a Pacific support person in BMS, Latika has formally supported Pasifika students since 2009. Under the leadership of Faumuina Professor Faafetai Sopoaga, she started running Friday lunch workshops and motivational talks. She also started lunch time academic tutorials for Pacific and Māori medical students but, with the increase in numbers, now arranges for senior students to run these. In 2014 she was invited to join the University of Otago Pacific Strategic Framework Group which has implemented a number of plans, resulting in a marked increase in the number of PI students at the University.

As her initial medical degree is from the Fiji School of Medicine, Fiji National University, Suva, Latika has always felt the need to assist her old school in her birth country. Between 2013 and 2019, she, and sometimes a team of other anatomy staff she gathered, travelled to assist and extend the Anatomy teaching at FSM, as well as the Umanand Prasad School of Medicine, The University of Fiji, Lautoka. They delivered lectures, practical sessions and helped set up a clinical skills lab at FSM, donating materials to enable the continuation of teaching activities.

"Pacific people play an important role in my adopted country (NZ). I feel that I need to share our privilege and expertise whenever possible to our Pacific neighbours and I endeavour to instil these traits in our graduates and staff at Otago."