



About Otago

Mō Ōtākou

"I want to champion change for Māori health"

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Carlton Irving's career began as an Intensive Care Paramedic and has led him down the path to becoming a doctor.

Ko Mātiti te maunga
Ko Waioweka te awa
Ko Mataatua te waka
Ko Te Whakatōhea tōku Iwi
Ko Ngāti Ira tōku hapū
Ko Carlton Irving tōku ingoa,
Nō Ōpōtiki ahau.

When dealt a second opportunity at a career with purpose, a Nelson paramedic was ready to take the plunge.

Originally from Ōpotiki, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery third-year student Carlton Irving plans to continue as he started, making a difference in Māori health. His

career began as an Intensive Care Paramedic and has led him down the path to becoming a doctor.

"I was deeply affected by the state of health of our Māori and Pasifika whānau I was treating daily. It led me to want to try and champion change in this space."

The father of five went on to volunteer for the Ministry of Health Kia Ora Hauora programme which encourages Māori youth into health careers. He then went on to complete a postgraduate course at Auckland University of Technology (AUT) to be an Extended Care Paramedic (ECP).

"As we did not have ECP roles in New Zealand I went to work overseas in Australia, the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea."



While Carlton was in Papua New Guinea he spent time working with the locals, fixing water supplies and running clinics to help with medical needs.

"While I was in Papua New Guinea, there was a massive earthquake. I spent time working with the locals, fixing water supplies and we ran clinics to help people. While I was there it dawned on me - I wanted to be a doctor."

Crunch time came when Carlton became debilitatingly unwell and a question of what matters most was at the forefront of his mind. He took what he thought may be his final holiday with his wife and when he was cleared of terminal illness, he knew what was next.

"I got home and thought to myself an opportunity like this is a chance to assess what you want to do with your life. I wanted to be a doctor and make a difference to Māori health. I was frustrated at how bad our health system is for Māori. I did what I could in

the roles I had as a paramedic but what I realised is to really make change for people in certain spaces you must be a doctor. It was the right place, the right time and so that's what led me to Otago."

With five kids, another one on the way, moving his family to Dunedin, choosing one of the hardest study paths and everything in-between has kept Carlton more than busy.



In 2016, Carlton's dedication to Māori patients in his paramedic work was recognised when he was made a Member of the Order.

"Med School is a grind. Med school with a family is a grind on steroids. It's genuinely quite hard but if you know where it's going to lead you, you can endure. When I'm not studying I chair the Kaunihera Manapou (Paramedic Council) and still work on the rescue helicopters back in the North Island. Over summer I worked on Project Kainga which is helping Māori communities to be more responsive to climate change. My days are full."

Carlton is also part of Te Oranga ki Ōtākou (TOKO/Māori Medical Students Association) where creating positive change for Māori students has been an important goal.

"One thing I noticed over at the Medical School is there wasn't a space set up for Māori students to gather. So the first goal we had for TOKO was to get a Māori health professionals space in the Hunter Centre, and now we have one. The way I see it, you can't look at a problem and then not be part of the solution."

"We've also been running Tuesday night Te Reo classes for staff and students. As an older student you need to role model what engaging Māori in a health space looks like, which is why I take time to teach Te Reo Māori. A lot of safety issues can come from not knowing the culture and the language so it's important our health professionals know these. It's an opportunity here to share with staff and students to help them understand us. If that's what I achieve while I'm here I'll be happy."

In the future, Carlton would like to use his training to still work in an emergency environment and has every intention of staying engaged with Māori in health to create better systems and support.

Kōrero by Internal Communications Adviser, Chelsea McRae