

## A bicultural perspective on health

*Health and Society in Aotearoa New Zealand*  
(Second edition)

Kevin Dew and Peter Davis (editors)

Oxford University Press, 2005

ISBN: 0 19558 469 4. RRP: \$49.95 AUD

THE WAY PEOPLE THINK about health, ill-health and health services has changed enormously over the past 20 years in New Zealand. This book reviews these topics within a sociological frame. It is distinctly New Zealand and its contributions were written by academics. Dr Kevin Dew and Professor Peter Davis have edited a coherent text in which the contributors have taken the opportunity offered to give fresh insights into sometimes controversial subjects.

The second edition of this book continues the tradition of the first in providing the combined insights of academics located in public health schools and social science departments within well known New Zealand universities. As might be expected of a book such as this, it pays particular attention to the bicultural development of New Zealand and links this development to the health of New Zealand's indigenous people. The title of the book, *Health and society in Aotearoa New Zealand*, suggests that the text might be about more than health and society in a country colonised by British subjects. This is so and is commented on below.

The chapters are grouped in five parts. The first provides an overview of the field and discusses the way in which health or medical sociology is studied. It is in this first section that two Maori academics elaborate their "Maori health view" and challenge the reader to reflect upon it. They challenge many of the beliefs and values that are taken as given in contemporary New Zealand society.

The second part is concerned with structure. Following an overview of social structure and its relationship to health, there is a chapter on the implications for health and health services of chang-



THIS ISSUE of the Journal provides book reviews on two quite different subject matters: health policy and practices in New Zealand and an Australian text exploring sustainable global health practices. These texts provide insights into cultural and environmental issues that shape the health systems in which we work and they provide a basis for considering health policy and management implications in their respective areas. Happy reading.

**Gary E Day**

Book Review Editor, Australian Health Review

ing demographics. Aotearoa New Zealand, like other OECD countries, is facing new challenges that will require new strategies if they are to be addressed.

Part Three is about culture. The first contribution explores its meanings and successfully addresses the chapter heading "The culture of health and illness". This is followed by a discussion of the health of Pacific People. In the third chapter in this section of the book, Alzheimer's disease and dementia care are used for a case study of how formal and informal caring takes place in the community. Health professions and practice, traditional topics in medical sociology, are discussed in Part Four. This material naturally follows the earlier sections and further explores the importance of discourse and the power of those whose discourse is dominant. Again, case studies are used to develop themes.

The final four chapters, and largest part of the book, are devoted to policy. The first chapter is concerned with health reform and change. The second focuses on primary care, and in particular the challenge of the New Zealand health strategy to engage with the community in planning and development. The third chapter again considers the reform agenda but this time considers Maori health within the broader context. The final chapter uses a case study to raise questions that will need to be considered as health policy develops in the future.

Some readers outside New Zealand may be surprised by the emphasis on Maori and the suggestion that Aotearoa New Zealand be thought of as two different countries. To some, the idea may be considered radical. I can imagine some New Zealand readers being challenged by the arguments advanced by those contributors who have written from a Maori perspective. However, in my opinion, it is this feature of the book that makes it distinctive. These contributors challenge dominant attitudes and

beliefs — such perspectives are not always given standing.

So how could it have been improved? The demography of New Zealand is changing. Perhaps in a future edition, the health of Asian people will be considered deserving of a chapter. Like Pacific people in earlier periods, Asian people are now no longer referred to as 'Other' on census forms.

I warmly recommend this well edited text. It will be used within New Zealand universities. It deserves a much wider readership.

Reviewer rating: ★★★★★

**Dr Rod Perkins**

Senior Lecturer in Health Management  
Health Systems Group  
and Associate

Centre for Health Services Research and Policy  
School of Population Health  
The University of Auckland

## Future investment

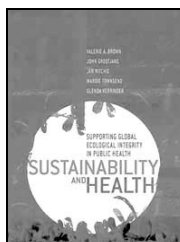
*Sustainability and health: supporting global ecological integrity in public health*

Valarie A Brown, John Grootjans, Jan Ritchie, Mardie Townsend and Glenda Verrinder (editors)

Allen and Unwin, 2005

ISBN: 1 74114 442 6. RRP: \$59.95 AUD

SUSTAINABILITY IS ONE OF those buzz words that is often used, but I suspect is poorly understood. In the last few decades of the 20th century, scientific support began to demonstrate overwhelming evidence for global climate change and major environmental impacts that have the real possibility of resulting in significant impacts on the health and well-being of current and future generations. Unfortunately, up until now, public health practitioners have not seemed to play as pivotal a role in the process as is necessary. Given this background, the text *Sustainability and health* provides some welcome answers to the question "What is the role for public health practitioners in the sustainability governance process?"



This text is the product of a 3-year collaboration between a number of mainly local public health academics and practitioners. Participants contributed to web-based discussion groups to clarify issues surrounding sustainability and health, and then participated in a writing workshop to prepare the first draft of the text. The text therefore approaches the issues from the viewpoint that multidisciplinary collaboration is necessary to address health aspects of sustainability, and in fact, public health practitioners require a new world view and way of working if they are to provide solutions to the complex issues we are facing.

The text aims to answer three central questions: Why is sustainability of key importance to public health? Why does sustainability require a new approach for public health? What difference does sustainability make to my current practice? Through the use of learning activities, readings, international case studies and an open learning approach to present conceptual frameworks and theoretical perspectives, the chapters of the text are structured around answering these questions by specifically discussing the following topics: living sustainably; listening to multiple perspectives; grounding in collaborative frameworks; acknowledging multiple forms of evidence; scoping the global and local context of public health action; acting for global integrity; innovating for global integrity; and managing for the sustainability of health and environment in the long-term future.

Given the large spectrum of information covered in the text and the new "mind set" that it advocates, the concepts and issues discussed will require the reader to take their time to absorb and understand the material, but will also encourage discussion with colleagues. If public health practitioners will invest this time in the text, I am sure that it will provide a solid platform and key resource for addressing critical issues in sustainability and health and will help public health practitioners more fully engage in the sustainability debate.

Reviewer rating: ★★★★★

**Thomas Tenkate, DrPH**

Lecturer in Environmental Health  
School of Public Health  
Queensland University of Technology