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**Rongoā Māori cannot just be taken, legislated**

by Pauline E. Tangiora

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**OPINION PIECE**



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The third Parlimentary select committee is sitting on the Therapeutic Products Bill. It appears that the Government may wish to take authority of Rongoā Māori and other te ao Māori healing practices. If this is not stopped immediately and Māori are not included in a good discussion with the Government about why they cannot do this, this will be another takeover by stealth, like the Native Land Court in the 1900s.

To begin with, one needs to explain the concept of Rongoā Māori. Each hapū, or tribal area, have their own interpretation of Rongoā Māori (healing practices) and it is up to them if they wish to share it.

One cannot take something that belongs to someone and legislate willy nilly because that would be trampling on the wairua of each district’s customs and protocols.

It has come to my attention that one Māori sat around the table with Government to discuss this before it came to select committee.

If this is so, then Māori and Pakeha should sit down and understand each other on a greater spectrum.

Having lived in the King Country, and being a reporter for the Taumaranui Press, some years ago I interviewed a 95-year-old koroua.

I was humbled to hear him discuss how he did his Rongoā Māori in Kakahi Bush.

When moving up to the North, they had a different method of prepping their Rongoā Māori.

Over 100 years ago, Mother Aubert was trusted with many Māori medicines which she held very sacred.

We have seen, even today, Māori healers have entrusted Pakeha about how to safely use and appreciate our Rongoā Māori. If there is to be any legislation under the New Zealand government, that should be totally wrong. In the early 1980s, Jill Wihongi called many Māori women together at Hone Waititi Marae in Auckland. They discussed the abuse that was happening to our Rongoā Māori and what we needed to do about it. The late Dame Georgina Kirby was present at this meeting and from this meeting, Wai262 (a claim of Mātauranga Māori, which is the unique Māori way of viewing the world - encompassing both traditional knowledge and culture) was first talked about. The consensus was that pharmaceutical companies around the world were using our Rongoā Māori.

From 1992, I went to the Earth Summit in Rio, Brazil. I attended the Kari-oka. It was alarming to see indigenous peoples from 92 nations voicing the same concerns as we were in Aotearoa, NZ.

Out of this conference came the Kari-Oka Document, voicing these concerns. Marcus Terena presented to the Earth Summit leaders. It was the first time ever that a non-government member had spoken to such an assembly.

Out of this came the Earth Charter, which the United Nations has accepted in their documentations.

Within this document, it states that Indigenous are the kaitiaki (guardians) of the forests and those commodities which they have inherited from the whenua, earth and the waters.

They are responsible for how they are kept for the next generations to come.

In Tairāwhiti, we have had and still have, many healers in various forms. Therefore, let us not go down the path of legislating something that does not belong to something this new Bill proposes. Instead, let Māori come together for themselves to set their own whakaaro (thoughts), without any interjection from government. They know who the healers are and I do know they come together regularly on a national basis to discuss their mahi.

Finally, my wero to Parliament is to support staff at the hospitals throughout the country. Maybe every member of Parliament gives up 5-7 days of their holidays so that some staff can be relieved to have a holiday? Having recently been a patient in hospital, and holding a hand of another patient who was afraid throughout the night, I’m sure any member of Parliament would be useful, whether holding a lonely patient’s hand or emptying a bed pan or feeding a patient who cannot feed themselves.

Some kuia or koroua are using their Rongoā Māori alongside western medicines. Wouldn’t it be great if 120 Parliamentarians turned up at their hospitals to give a few days off for medical staff to have more than a half a day off the ward?

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