

## Positive Inclusion Award Winner:

### Nirvana Health Group

**Video link <https://vimeo.com/104979419>**

Melting pot of cultures, ethnicities and religions is a recipe for a happy family.

The Nirvana Health group owns and manages the largest network of primary healthcare clinics in New Zealand under the banner of East Tamaki Healthcare, West Auckland Healthcare, Mt. Roskill Healthcare and White Cross.

East Tamaki Healthcare (ETHC) has over 37 years' experience in large scale delivery of primary care services to the highly diverse communities of the greater Auckland region. Nirvana Health Group was incorporated to serve as the umbrella company for all these business units with in excess of 30 Medical Clinics ensuring New Zealanders have access to 24 hour private medical care. There are currently over 170,000 enrolled patients and many more who visit as casual patients on a daily basis.

There is no one initiative that best exemplifies the celebration of "innovative responses to inclusivity" within the Nirvana Health Group. Rather a continuous and consistent number of initiatives interwoven into practical day-to-day occurrences make up the Nirvana Health culture.

Started in Otara in 1977 by a young Indian couple, Kanti and Ranjna Patel to meet the high need of a culturally diverse population, the company has gone from the strength to strength with the couples family values ethos at the core of their success.

The culturally diverse communities which they serve always has and continues to be reflected in the multicultural workforce employed by the Patel's with current ethnic representation at almost 40 different groups in a staff of 500 medical and support staff across the clinics.

One of the major challenges of healthcare organisations in New Zealand for the past 15 years has been the low number of local graduates in the field of medicine and nursing. This is more pronounced in the primary healthcare sector. The few local graduates preferred to work in the hospital setting.

For many years East Tamaki Healthcare was highly-dependent on overseas trained graduates, predominantly from South Asia, Middle East, the Pacific Islands and the Philippines. It is only in the past couple of years that more local graduates have started joining the Nirvana Group workforce. The acquisition of White Cross Clinics in 2007 added another cultural dimension to the growing organisation as the majority of the staff at these are of European descent.

Just like in any family, not all children are the same. The parents look after the particular and diverse needs of each of their children. The same is true of the Nirvana family. Early on, it was recognised that a revolving organisational culture and practices should reflect and answer the needs and expectations of a growing culturally-diverse workforce. This approach means that everyone in the Nirvana family celebrates each other's religious and cultural festivals.

Dr Oruba Khalil who came to New Zealand from a war torn Iraq in 1996 and joined the company in 1998, talks about her work as a GP within the Nirvana Health Group and as a practising Muslim.

“Working with colleagues from different cultures and a variety of beliefs helped me a lot. The interactions between us and the respect I felt from the management was one of the good reasons that helped me to settle in this company.”

“I pray at least 2-3 times during work hours. Everyone working with me is aware that I need to do it at special times. My timetable during Ramadan will be planned so I can do my religious duties. To pay them back, I make sure that I will share my Eid celebrations with my colleagues, to say thank you to them that they were patient and tolerant to me during Ramadan”.

Since the clinic network operates seven days a week and 365 days of the year, it is common practice that staff offer to work extra hours on these special occasions to allow their colleagues to take the time off to celebrate the occasion with their respective families. It is moving for a Christian to offer to work so that their Muslim colleagues can celebrate Ramadan and Eid. The goodwill gesture is reciprocated during Christmas and Easter and similarly for all the other festivities. This is testament to the truly unique organisational culture of Nirvana as embedded by its founders, The Patel's.

The cultural and ethnic/religious diversity of staff is also an asset in order to effectively engage with the communities that Nirvana serve, utilising the staff as a resource to engage with their respective ethnic and religious groups.

Something else that Nirvana do well is to celebrate the strengths of their staff and support them in areas of improvement. Like any other family, what is important is not the specifics such as gender or race but rather “what is best for the staff and the organisation”.

However, the company are keen to encourage greater gender balance across the workforce, including employing more female general practitioners within the group. They recognise that offering a flexible workplace is one of the best ways to achieve this and female GP's with young families who wish to work shorter hours are accommodated accordingly.

Traditionally, the nursing profession has been female-dominated. In New Zealand, only 7% of nurses are males with an even lower percentage in primary healthcare. Not so in the Nirvana Group who have 10% male representation amongst the nursing staff. At one point this was as high as 15% - the slightly higher percentage is thought to be as a result of male nurses who have migrated with their families to New Zealand.

“I feel privileged to be working in a female dominated profession. It definitely comes with its challenges but I bring a new perspective and ideas. There were many nurses that graduated in my year so I was pleased to be chosen for this job. I look forward to working in other clinics within the Nirvana health Group. I strengthen and develop my skills and confidence through the new graduate programme and other ongoing trainings provided by the organisation”.

All of these statistics and the testimonials of staff speak volumes of the positive influence of diversity and inclusion on the organisational culture of the Nirvana Health Group. A

company which operates on values of acceptance and respect, nurturing and growing its employees who in turn invest passion and commitment into making the Nirvana Group the success it is and one big multicultural happy family!