

## Walk the Talk Award Winner: Ranjna Patel – East Tamaki Healthcare

**Video Link <https://vimeo.com/104979478>**

Community-driven leadership philosophy builds diverse, sustainable New Zealand healthcare.

“Be the best for our community” was the simple guiding vision for Ranjna Patel and her husband when they started their first medical practice in Otara. The location of the clinic was chosen so they could give something back to the culturally diverse community, predominantly of Maori and Pacific Island descent, that had welcomed and embraced them when they settled there as new migrants.

This simple vision has continued to guide Ranjna’s leadership and over nearly four decades that first clinic has evolved into East Tamaki Healthcare, encompassing 22 GP clinics and nine White Cross emergency clinics.

Founder and Director for East Tamaki Healthcare (ETHC), Ranjna now provides leadership for more than 500 medical professionals and support staff.

ETHC clinics continue to serve a high-needs and culturally-diverse population.

Like the patients it serves the ETHC workforce is composed of different age demographics, ethnicities, religions and genders, creating an environment where a range of skill sets and talents play a vital role in the organisation serving the 174,000 residents across the high needs population of the Auckland Region.

Within the area that ETHC serves, it has the highest number of Maori and Pacific Islanders in the South Pacific region/Australasia. The demographics are approximately 18% European, 40% Pacific Island/ Maori, 32% Indians, 11% of other ethnicities.

The range of ethnicities across ETHC staff – encompassing almost 40 ethnic groups – reflects a similar composition, comprising 15% European, 35% Pacific Island/Maori, 30% Indians, inclusive of Fijian Indian and 20% of other ethnicities.

Ethnic diversity among staff in a healthcare setting provides the obvious advantage of enabling them to interact, understand and communicate with the various ethnicities of patients seeking treatment with ETHC.

Recruiting from a diverse talent pool has also assisted ETHC – now the largest private primary HEALTHCARE provider of outpatient services in New Zealand – in overcoming the staffing shortages that have hindered other organisations.

“One of the major challenges of healthcare organisations in New Zealand for the past 15 years is the low number of local graduates in the field of medicine and nursing and this is more pronounced in the primary healthcare sector.”

Under Ranjna’s leadership ETHC has recruited overseas-trained graduates from South Asia, the Middle East, Pacific Islands and the Philippines to work in many of its clinics. While the

organisation is now starting to see more local graduates joining the workforce, there is a commitment to create opportunity for skilled healthcare professionals who are overlooked by other New Zealand providers.

Ranjna has offered employment to experienced doctors who hold qualifications that are not recognised in New Zealand, by placing them into any role that becomes vacant in allied fields. These roles have varied from receptionist to data entry or working on community ETHC projects but it has provided them with a foot in the door, put them among the right people in an industry they were originally qualified for, and built their confidence in language and communications.

“For many of them this is the first step of encouragement and provides a platform for them to go on and meet the required qualifications to be able to officially practice in New Zealand.”

Ranjna has also been successful in helping skilled a number of Pacific nurses (from Fiji, Tonga, Samoa) pass their IELTS exams and become Resident Nurses in NZ.

Aside from building an ethnically diverse team, Ranjna’s leadership has also cultivated a positive culture for women looking to work in healthcare.

“Ranjna has managed the employment of many roles within ETHC and has actively encouraged women from a range of ethnic groups to get back into the workforce with ETHC as nurses, receptionists or administration staff to make the most of their individual skills.”

“A number of the receptionists have successfully progressed into becoming valuable Clinic Managers reflecting Ranjna’s leadership in staff development and desire for individuals to reach their potential.”

This commitment to developing opportunity and providing meaningful leadership has also seen Ranjna devoting significant time and energy to roles with other community organisations, including: Founding & Executive Trustee for Total Healthcare Otara PHO, Chairperson for NZ Central Indian Association (NZCIA) Women’s Group, Executive Committee Member (previously President) for Manukau Indian Association (Past President), Board Member for Lottery Auckland Distribution Committee and the Counties Manukau South Asian Police Advisory Board, Chair of MIT Indian Community Advisory Group and Member of the NZ Asian Leaders Advisory Board.

In recent years, ETHC has acquired the WhiteCross network of clinics, invested in the West Auckland and Mt. Roskill areas. They have recently incorporated Nirvana Health Group as the umbrella organisation which represents more than 30 medical clinics with a workforce of over 600 medical and support staff.

Despite ongoing growth and changes Ranjna remains constant in her vision for a diverse workforce, believing it is always important to look outside the square for good team players and foster talent and opportunity.

“Casting a wider net and making a conscious effort to consider many possible options has allowed ETHC to reap the rewards from different perspectives and life experiences.”