

Obituary

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Professor Sitaleki Finau

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Sitaleki 'Ata'ata Finau passed away in Auckland on Monday, 13 December 2021.



He was a great friend and colleague who inspired many to study public health. Sitaleki was a pioneer and strong advocate for improving the health of Pacific people in the region. He undertook a variety of roles in the region, including Aotearoa/ New Zealand and Australia. He

will be remembered for his sharp intellect and cheeky humour.

Sitaleki 'Ata'ata Finau was born in Masilamea, Tongatapu. (1949). He attended several primary schools in Te'ekiu, Nukunuku, Nuku'alofa, and Toloa, respectively. He entered Tonga High School in 1961 and Auckland Grammar School in 1967. He later attended the University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia, graduating in 1975 from the

School of Medicine, and in 1981 graduated from the University of Otago, New Zealand with a Postgraduate Diploma of Community Health. In 1994, he was registered as a Public Health Medicine specialist in New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific – the first Pacific person to do so. After serving as the Surgical and Casualty Registrar, Broken Hill District Hospital, New South Wales, Australia Dr Finau returned to Tonga in 1978 and worked for the Ministry of Health as Medical Officer-in-Charge, Medical Ward and Medical Clinics. He started outreach medical clinics in the health centres and the Catholic Clinic at Ma'ufanga. In 1981 he undertook a Medical Research Council of New Zealand Research

(NZMRC) Training Fellowship. He was employed at the Wellington Hospital Epidemiology unit as a trainee Research Fellow and worked on the Tokelau Migrant Study and the 1983 Foa and Nuku'alofa Cardiovascular Survey data. He returned to Tonga and oversaw the health centres and Community health Service and was also Medical Officer-in-Charge at Niu'eiki Hospital, 'Eua. During this time, he completed his specialist training in Public Health Medicine gaining membership of the College of Community Medicine (New Zealand). In December 1985, he was appointed the Coordinator of the Health Management Programme (1985-1988), and later the Assistant Head of the School of Social and Economic Development, at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji. He had since worked as: Assistant Professor for the University of Hawaii in Pohnpei, Federated States of Micronesia (1989-1991); the Manager of Community Health Service for South Pacific Commission (1991-1994) now called The Pacific Community, Noumea, New Caledonia; Senior District Medical Officer and Public Health Specialist with the Remote Health Services and the Royal Australian Flying Doctors in Alice Springs (1995), Central Australia; Senior Lecturer and Co-director of Pacific Health Research Centre, Division of Maori and Pacific Health, Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences, University of Auckland (1996-2000); and the Professor of Public Health at the Fiji School of Medicine, Fiji from 2001 to 2006. He also spent some time as the Director of Health, Ministry of Health, Niue.

In June 2006, Professor Sitaleki became the Director of the Pasifika@Massey Strategy at Massey University to put Pacificans in Massey University and Massey in and among the Pacific populations. He became the Professor of Pacific Health Development where he developed and taught undergraduate and postgraduate public health courses.

Dr Finau has contributed to Pacific health in New Zealand for many years and is considered a public health specialist and advocate for Tongans and Pacificans. He helped develop an ethnic-specific model of health care and established the Tongan Health Society Inc. and Langimalie Clinic

in Auckland, the only Pacific ethnic specific primary care organisation in New Zealand. He served as the inaugural Chief Executive Officer on a voluntary basis while the Clinic was in its early stages (1998-2004). He was instrumental in the starting of the Pacific community health workers' training programme.

Dr Finau was the founder and inaugural editor and manager of a Pacific regional professional journal, *'Pacific Health Dialog'* (1994-to 2019). He was awarded the Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit in 2010 (MNZM) for services to Pacific Islands community health.

Sitaleki was interested in waka ama, tennis, rugby, people, and food. He dabbled in writing of poetry and short stories mainly for his 3 children and 8 grandchildren. He is also a composer of Tongan lyrics. He has authored numerous peer-reviewed academic articles, presented at international conferences, and provided advice as a consultant to organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), Aus AID and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He was passionate about Pacific research and led research teams and projects focussing on issues related to health and education across the Pacific region. He has published a few books and started Masilamea Press Limited, a publisher specialising on Tongan and Pacific books. He is passionate about all matters Pacific and cultural democracy and a social democrat at heart.