



Historical Background

Some thirty years ago, doctors from Tauranga expressed much concern at the high incidence of stomach cancer of a diffuse type within a Maori population, thus sparking an interest from other cancer experts as to why this was occurring. At that time it was believed that this type of cancer was hereditary. Specific age groups were identified as being afflicted between the 14-30 age group which prompted the undertaking of investigations and many years of research by medical and other professionals, some from as far field as Otago, Wanganui and Palmerston North, each presenting their own theories, finally concluding that this disease is unique to a population of Maori and Scottish descent.

In 1994 a project, initiated by the whanau, was established with the aim of reducing the high incidence of gastric cancer within the Maori population and to protect the whanau and their taonga throughout this process.

In 1995 a pilot study began with 105 volunteering local whanau members at risk with the disease. This involved the collection of tissue samples and whakapapa information. The aim of this study was to identify a gene susceptible to the disease, identification of this gene would enable early intervention strategies to be targeted to those at greatest risk of developing stomach cancer.

Hence the Kimihaora Unit entered into a partnership agreement with Otago University, what was to be done and what was not to be done. The principal investigator being Dr Parry Guilford and Professor Anthony Reeve.

In 1997 a gene mutation was identified and genetic testing began. From there we formed the Aotearoa National Gastric cancer project to service a Rotorua whanau, we are also assisting in the setting up of 3 other places, those being Wanganui, East Coast and Taranaki.

Patients with the familial gastric cancer mutation face a 70% likelihood of developing CA during their lifetime is between 15-35 in both male and female. The local family have been recorded as having the largest Gastric Cancer pedigree in the world.

We have now entered into another research partnership agreement with the Molecular Bio Science Dept, of Massey University. The principal investigators, Dr Paul O'Toole and Senior Lab Technician, Natasha Forrester, Whanau Research Coordinator, Aroha Kakau.

The aim of this research is to investigate the harmful effects of a stomach bacteria "Helicobacter Pylori" which could be a major factor to causing stomach cancer.

The Project has blossomed and is now coming in to the second stage, and that is finding a cure for the disease.

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