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# Scholarship win wraps up a big year



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PMAANZ chair Michelle Te Kira, scholarship winner Niomi Fleming and General Practice NZ chair Jeff Lowe [image: GPNZ]

It is a time of change for Niomi Fleming: the 31-year-old Aucklander has started in a new job, won a scholarship and been voted onto a governance board.

Ms Fleming was given \$3500 towards a UNE Partnerships Diploma of Leadership in Healthcare Practice at the Practice Managers and Administrators Association of New Zealand conference in Rotorua last month.

The prize was sponsored by PMAANZ and General Practice NZ and was the first such scholarship.

“It is unexpected, but I am really positive about it,” she says.

The two-year diploma is a broad one targeted to practice management and includes finances and human resources. Ms Fleming is looking forward to it because she likes education, bettering her knowledge and also teaching.

She will do the diploma part time from next year, on top of her “quite hectic” job as aged-residential care practice manager at Third Age Health.

Wearing her PMAANZ hat, Ms Fleming holds the education portfolio on the board.

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The organisation encourages administrators and managers to study via the silver and bronze Knowledge and Skills Framework.

These are good steppingstones towards a formal education. Historically, she says, there has not been any education offered to practice managers so people have not been able to just pick it up as a career.

Ms Fleming started as a receptionist 11 years ago and has been a practice manager for three years: “I love it; I like interacting with people and problem-solving.”

She also likes the variety – “no day is the same” – and loves the challenges. It’s not unusual for receptionists to work their way up to practice management. Previously, Ms Fleming worked at Four Kauri Family Medical Centre in Mt Albert for a year and was at other practices before that.

She points to a lack of skilled practice managers. Opportunities come up and sometimes you can’t say no: “I wasn’t looking for the role, it was offered to me and [kind of] fell in my lap,” she says.

Ms Fleming is in her second month at Third Age Health. She describes it as “a big step up” but says: “I will get there once I learn all the ropes.” She will be based in Auckland but will also work in Taranaki, Christchurch, Hawke’s Bay and Hamilton.

The role involves catching up with teams, solving problems and rostering clinicians. It’s hard to get staff, so people travel to fill gaps.

A team led by her predecessor finds the staff and Ms Fleming manages them once they are onboard.

Practice managers can be underappreciated for all the work they do, may have a lot of titles under one job and even hold the purse strings, she says.

They are there if someone has a cry in their office, they are the IT guy, the trouble-shooter and business planner, adds Ms Fleming.

In general practice, the practice manager is the main go-to person, which means a lot of responsibility, she says. With a range of teams, and a clinical lead to bounce ideas off, she finds there is more support for the role.

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