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Too busy to take the PMAANZ stage: Practice Manager Specialist of the Year recipient appreciated

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Tanziha Matin Practice Manager Specialist of the Year for 2022, arrived in New Zealand as an IT student in 2015 [image: Marcus Bailey - Glimpse Photography]

Natasha Jojoa Burling finds out what it takes to be the best general practice manager in New Zealand

Tanziha Matin was so busy filling in at St Lukes Medical Centre in Auckland, she did not have time to accept her Practice Manager Specialist of the Year Award last month.

Instead, Ms Matin's video entry was played at the plenary at the Practice Managers and Administrators Association of New Zealand conference, held in Rotorua 27 to 29 October, and she attended virtually.

Her prize was a \$500 gift voucher from Flight Centre and registration and accommodation for the PMAANZ 2023 conference.

The runner-up was Karen Greer, from Bulls Medical Centre, whose entry video was also played.

Ms Martin says she wasn't expecting the award and "never thought I would feel so appreciated".

She says people tend to acknowledge the work of nurses and doctors but not administration staff.

Working seven days a week including paperwork on Sundays, Ms Martin says the practice used to have five receptionists but now has only one, despite increasing the pay rate and improving the facilities.

frustration out on the first point of contact so it's hard to keep receptionists unless they really like helping people, she says. The practice has enough doctors and nurses.

The 27-year-old Bangladeshi has run St Lukes Medical Centre since 2018. She started there as a receptionist in 2016, after arriving in New Zealand on New Year's Eve the previous year as an IT student. She worked as an information technology officer at the practice while doing a bachelor's degree in IT and has since graduated with a major in information systems.

Ms Martin accepted the practice manager role because she likes helping people. She says she enjoys the job, despite the problems created by COVID-19.

Presented with a difficult choice in March 2020 – when she bought a plane ticket to go home to look after her father, who had been diagnosed with cancer – she chose to remain in New Zealand. Fortunately, three of her eight siblings were in Bangladesh to look after her dad, who is still alive.

The first lockdown was the “most horrible time” of her life, she says, because there was so much pressure on staff. But at this time she realised how much she loved her job. At 6am every day hundreds of people would queue for a COVID-19 test but they were respectful and patient, she says.

Ms Martin did “everything”, including swabbing patients for the disease, helping the nurses and her usual practice management work.

Her IT studies have been useful. During COVID-19 she created a system that allowed people to fill in forms from their cars, which reduced the queue and alerted staff to the fact someone was waiting. Nurses could see people’s car registrations on the form, so knew which to approach.

“Be kind and courageous and you won’t fail” is a lesson she learned from her mother and is what she aspires to. She says her mum, who completed a high school diploma at 43 after having eight children, is her inspiration.

Her parents taught her to work hard from a young age and said she would get results one day.

Ms Martin started her degree in 2016 but put her studies on hold due to work pressure. Later, her employer, specialist GP Bashir Ahmed, encouraged her to carry on and gave her space to study. She finally graduated in October from Auckland Institute of Studies.

As for the future, Ms Martin will stay with St Lukes Medical Centre to manage the extension of the practice, so it includes more specialists, radiology and an on-site laboratory. The building is due for completion within five years.

Via email, PMAANZ chair Michelle Te Kira says the award was a close contest between Ms Martin and Mrs Greer. "All the judges found both finalists completely different and impressive in different ways," says Ms Te Kira.

It came down to a choice between lifetime achievement and a future leader and they chose the future leader, says Ms Te Kira.

The judges considered the videos, a written submission from each candidate with set questions, and references, and agreed Ms Martin's references and submission were exceptional.

However, Ms Te Kira says: “Karen Greer, our runner-up, is a superstar and the judges feel she deserves a Lifetime Achievement Award.”

Tanziha Matin

- › Arrives in New Zealand from Bangladesh – 2015.
- › Takes receptionist job at St Lukes Medical Centre in Auckland – 2016.
- › Is promoted to practice manager – 2018.
- › Gains bachelor’s degree in IT from Auckland Institute of Studies; wins Practice Manager Specialist of the Year – 2022.

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