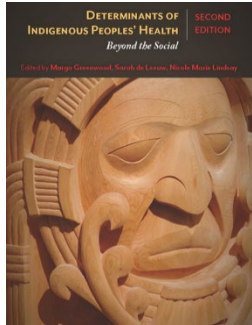




## Beyond the Social: Author Interviews



Welcome to [Beyond the Social: Author Interviews](#), a video series produced by the National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. The NCCIH focuses on innovative research and community-based initiatives promoting the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. All of the contributors interviewed in this video series, from the highly-acclaimed book [Determinants of Indigenous Peoples' Health in Canada: Beyond the Social](#), share a common concern with improving the health of Indigenous peoples in Canada and beyond. In sharing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit traditional knowledge alongside Western academic and medical knowledge, the authors demonstrate the potential gains of walking in two worlds, integrating the best of both Indigenous and Western knowledge, and honouring and respecting the diverse healing and medical practices available to us today.

## Video – Chapter 19: Practising "the Good Way of Life" from the Hospital Bed to Mother Earth, with James and Patricia Makokis



Patricia Makokis and her son, Dr. James Makokis, share their family stories of her hysterectomy and his experience in becoming a doctor trained in Western medicine to help others understand an alternative way of practising holistic wellness. Through the sharing of these stories, they highlight the strength and resiliency within their Cree culture, which allows them to honour their

own ways of being, even from inside Western medical institutions.

## Transcript

My name is James Makokis. I am from Saddle Lake Cree Nation in northeastern Alberta. I am one of the co-authors on this book chapter along with my mother, Patricia Makokis.

**Patricia:** One of the first things, when it comes to our health, that's critical in that process is, based on our story, is having Indigenous people working in the hospitals who understand that there are different ways of being, there are different belief systems or different health practices,

and having medical doctors, having specialists who are open to listening to those needs and, more importantly, ensuring that they do everything they can to honour the fact that there are different ways of ... different requests that people have. I have to say I saw a physician, a gynaecologist I had ... I knew what I wanted and I went in and I spoke to her and she was very supportive. She told me to put my wishes into a letter and that letter was taken to a liaison person in the hospital. I met with that person and she in turn moved it to the unit that I would be staying with. So when I went into the hospital, they already knew what my wishes were.

**James:** I think it's important to understand in the health field and health professions – whether that's medicine, nursing, pharmacy – that there was an indigenous health system here prior to contact. So, when we talk about Indigenous medicines and Indigenous ceremonies, those formed the foundation of our health system. The original medicines to this continent on Turtle Island, they are Indigenous medicines. They are not alternative medicines. So, when we frame things from that perspective, then western medicine is actually the alternative medicine. For health practitioners and the health system to know that is important. What forms the foundation of our health are these two things together – which are our ceremonies ... we had a ceremony called the Midaylcomik or the Midaywin Lodge, and that forms the foundation of our training of medicines for people and knowledge exchange, as well as our other ceremonies that form the foundation of our health – our “miyo-pimâtisiwin,” as our chapter is called. That needs to be understood.

For medical students, what helped me through medical school is having the support and prayers from our elders in the community who would continuously do ceremonies for my sister and I to get through medical school, which unfortunately for many Indigenous learners can be very racist and a very unsafe space for us to practice and learn when we should be learning about anatomy and physiology and all the other things we need to be good doctors. A lot of the time we do experience racism or even physical harassment. So, in terms of what will help students through that is a strong sense of understanding of themselves, which sometimes they do discover in medicine because they need to. They need that foundation of their identity, and their spirituality, and their community, to support them through that process. Medical students in general should be learning about the Indigenous health experience in Canada, within the health care system, which has foundations in experimentation of Indigenous people trying vaccines and forced sterilization, all of these things which form the resistance that Indigenous people have to going in for health and healing into the health system, and to counter that would be learning about our medicines and ceremonies from elders and medicine people who can teach them to really help in the healing of our people because it's with our own medicines and systems that our people would live long, healthy lives. With Western medicine, I view it as helping to address the sicknesses of social illnesses and dysfunction.

Patricia: What Western medicine can learn is that we are gifts of creation. We are loaned our bodies, and as such, we have to respect that and respect ourselves and our body and not to take that for granted. Every day that we get to wake up is a gift. Every day that we get to put our feet

on the ground is a gift. It's when you don't have those things that I think people all of a sudden realize what we've lost. We should be honouring and recognizing what we have – the gift of life, the gift of a body, sound mind. I think that one of the most important things is how we see our bodies and other things as well.

**James:** Trauma and grief can become so overwhelming in the community and our ceremonies were prevention mechanisms to dealing with those things when they happened, and that when we practice them, it helps people to deal with their trauma, grief, loss, and all of those things which can be very difficult for people to cope with. We have to remember that in our teachings, death is just another phase of our experience here and we will continue on in the spirit world. We do different things in ceremony to help people with that grieving process as well. It's by participating and bringing those back and helping our people understand what those are that we can start dealing with this overwhelming sense of despair which happens in the community sometimes around grief and loss and trauma, and those sorts of things.

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