

JAMES MAKOKIS

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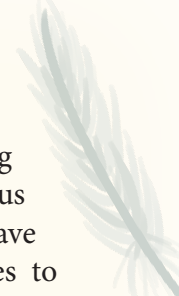
For those who do not watch *The Amazing Race* on television, Dr. James Makokis may be an unfamiliar name. Besides being the winner of the show's seventh season, Makokis has established himself as an Indigenous health advocate and gamechanger in transgender patient wellness.¹

EARLY ROOTS

Growing up in the Saddle Lake Cree Nation, Makokis knew he wanted to be a doctor at the young age of four.^{1,2} Having earned a Master's Degree in Health Sciences from the University of Toronto and a Doctor of Medicine Degree from the University of Ottawa, he graduated from the University of British Columbia's Aboriginal Family Medicine Residency program in 2012.³ A colleague once told him: "If you really want to make a difference in medicine, why don't you start doing transgender health because there's so few physicians who provide medical transitioning for patients? And there's so many barriers to doing that." This comment eventually came to reflect the essence of Makokis' career.⁴

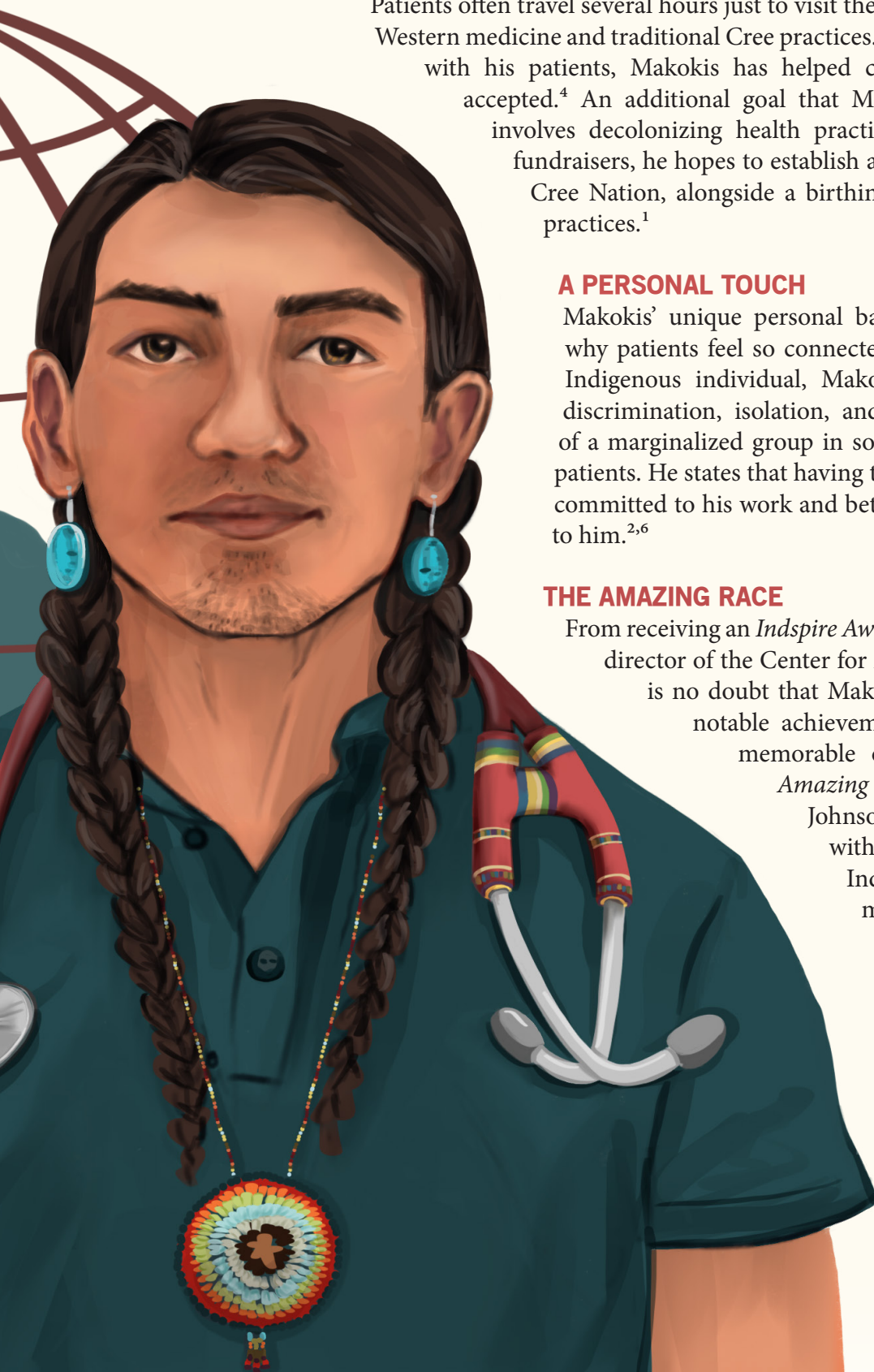
MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN HIS COMMUNITY

Based outside Edmonton, Alberta, Makokis runs the only clinic in the Enoch



Cree Nation that is focused on providing quality care for trans and two-spirit individuals from both Cree communities and around the world. According to Makokis, “two-spirit” is a contemporary English term reflecting the substantial gender and sexual diversity commonly found in Indigenous communities.⁵ Unfortunately, over 50% of trans and/or two-spirit people have attempted or died by suicide, something which Makokis constantly strives to ameliorate.⁶

Patients often travel several hours just to visit the clinic, where he uniquely combines Western medicine and traditional Cree practices. By establishing a strong connection with his patients, Makokis has helped countless individuals feel safe and accepted.⁴ An additional goal that Makokis continues to work towards involves decolonizing health practices. With the help of grants and fundraisers, he hopes to establish a cultural healing center in Kehewin Cree Nation, alongside a birthing center based on Cree midwifery practices.¹



A PERSONAL TOUCH

Makokis’ unique personal background may be another reason why patients feel so connected to him. As a gay, two-spirit, and Indigenous individual, Makokis has experienced his share of discrimination, isolation, and fear that stems from being part of a marginalized group in society —feelings often shared by his patients. He states that having these personal stories helps him stay committed to his work and better empathize with those that come to him.^{2,6}

THE AMAZING RACE

From receiving an *Indspire Award* in 2007 to becoming the medical director of the Center for Addiction and Mental Health, there is no doubt that Makokis’ life has been filled with many notable achievements.³ However, perhaps his most memorable one to date is winning Canada’s *Amazing Race 7* with his husband, Anthony Johnson. Makokis and Johnson competed with outfits that highlighted important Indigenous issues, such as the ongoing missing and murdered Indigenous women crises.⁷ Based on his contributions both outside and inside the clinic, it is clear that Dr. James Makokis is a warm-hearted individual who is passionate about making a positive impact on others.

References can be found on our website: meducator.org