



# Indigenous research

## *A personal perspective*

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To date there are not many indigenous people working in medical research. To be employed in a position where you can still work with your own people at a level where learning is mutually beneficial is worthwhile and rewarding for the community and yourself. I am a Research Associate (Indigenous Research Trainee) with the Centre for Remote Health and Flinders University. I am employed under the Primary Health Care Research and Evaluation and Development (PHCRED) program.

Since the commencement of my placement with the Centre for Remote Health in January this year, my time has been spent equipping myself with new skills and knowledge. My role is to assist in the research, development and evaluation of programs and new research projects. So far my experiences have all been rewarding; at times challenging; but most of all fulfilling, both personally and professionally. The favourite part of my job is that I am on the ground working with and learning from everyday people, not solely organisations or institutions.

Coming into my position, without a health sciences background, I had barriers to overcome such as understanding medical terminology, methodologies and approaches. All are major aspects of learning under the PHCRED program. Despite these significant barriers, I have already broadened my knowledge immensely.

Being an indigenous researcher allows me to have substantial input into research processes within the indigenous community, to protect informants, and to educate nonindigenous researchers about culturally safe and appropriate research techniques, while at the same time developing my own research skills. I appreciate that indigenous people have a culture as diverse as Australia itself; therefore, I am aware that culturally safe and appropriate research techniques differ between cultural groups and research projects.

In this way my research philosophy differs from the current dominant western approach. Incorporating my own indigenous worldview into western research methodologies and research procedures is a major challenge. I believe that within all research there should be room to move within the project to understand the nature of the research from the point of view of the target group, as well as from within a western philosophy. At times, when research needs to be informed by both these worldviews to tell a story, I feel a lot is left out because of differences in understanding. Due to these differences, attitudes toward the style of research, its themes or its culture at times have an effect on cross cultural relationships. This is a challenge that generates frustration and tension but has the potential to create an appropriate learning environment.

I believe that knowledge acquired

through life experience is often undervalued and overlooked. The academic environment is rigid, where processes are first learned and utilised later. When learning within the workplace you gain not only knowledge, but experience. Overall, I have gained a better understanding of approaches to health research.

I intend to continue working with research; I believe it can be very beneficial to the development of people everywhere. I aim to complete my traineeship with the same enthusiasm with which I started, and do the best that I can with the knowledge and skills gained through my experiences to assist in the development of better health care outcomes for indigenous people. I encourage anybody interested in health research to think realistically and constructively about changes that could be made within your community, the work involved and consider being a part of it.

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