

Ask the Specialist: Larrakia, Tiwi and Yolŋu stories to inspire better healthcare

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A new podcast released today, *Ask the Specialist*, reveals the reality of the hospital experience for Aboriginal patients in the Top End of the Northern Territory and offers ideas to improve the delivery of culturally respectful care.

Rarrtjiwuy Melanie Herdman is a Yolŋu leader, a health professional and one of the Specialists in this unique Territory health podcast. In the podcast, she shares her own experience in the hospital and gives practical examples of how healthcare could be better provided to patients in the Top End.

“Most of my family who go to hospital, they believe they are going there to die. I have had family who have chosen to die at home instead of going to hospital because they have seen other families struggle with being in hospital,” Ms Herdman said.

Created on Larrakia country by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) with Aboriginal community leaders and Royal Darwin Hospital staff, the seven-episode series answers doctors’ questions about working with Aboriginal patients.

Questions range from the practical: “Is it ok to make eye contact?” to issues at the heart of social justice: “I want to know what Aboriginal people feel like when we talk to them, what makes them think that we’re racist?”.

The Specialists are Larrakia, Tiwi and Yolŋu leaders: Aunty Bilawara Lee, Pirrawayingi Puruntatameri, Rarrtjiwuy Melanie Herdman and Stuart Yiwarr McGrath. They share personal experiences as patients, professional experiences as health workers and cultural knowledge.

The Specialists hope their stories, which elevate the Aboriginal patient’s perspective and challenge negative stereotypes that fuel racism, inspire health workers to reflect on their beliefs so they can deliver culturally safe care.

“The knowledge shared in these podcasts must be communicated as widely as possible so that the health workforce is better prepared to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have to enter the western medical system,” Larrakia Elder Aunty Bilawara Lee said.

Ask the Specialist producer and Menzies PhD student Vicki Kerrigan said the podcasts have been piloted with a small group of doctors from Royal Darwin Hospital and the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

“A long-term Darwin doctor described the podcasts as ‘Clinical Care Gold!’ and told me these stories will change how care is delivered to Aboriginal patients. We hope that’s the case,” Ms Kerrigan said.

Each episode addresses a theme to enhance the delivery of culturally respectful care:

Episode 1: Get to know your patient

- Episode 2: Communicating with your patient
- Episode 3: Communicating with interpreters and your patient
- Episode 4: Patient-centered care
- Episode 5: Informed consent
- Episode 6: Recognising and addressing racism
- Episode 7: Perspectives on health and wellbeing

The series is available to download on [Spotify](#) and [Apple Podcasts](#).

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Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 30 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.