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Aspects of Traditional Medicine

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Abstract

I grew up on an American Indian Reservation in Southeast Alaska with access to our Traditional ways. I loved to listen to my elders as they taught me many important lessons. When I graduated from high school we were discouraged from going to college so I got a job in our Tribal Sawmill. While working there I had my legs crushed in a terrible accident. I was flown to the nearest hospital in a US Coast Guard helicopter and it took over 3 hours to get to medical care. During my healing journey I was exposed to the medical profession and felt a calling to become a physician and return to my reservation. We had no physicians on our reservation and only rarely would get a public health nurse out to give us vaccinations. I went to college and I was fortunate enough to get into medical school at the world famous Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. I had wonderful training, but the culture shock I experienced caused me to seriously consider quitting. I could not see how I could retain my traditional culture and beliefs and become a physician. After my first year of medical school I was offered a Summer job tutoring high school students on a nearby reservation that were having trouble in school. The Mayo Clinic provided many materials for me to teach with and the students and I had a wonderful time learning together. It became evident that there was nothing wrong with these students except they did not have teachers who knew how to communicate properly with them. While there I was invited to join a traditional medicine man and others in a traditional sweat lodge ceremony. This an ancient ceremony most American Indian tribes use for spiritual healing and cleansing. I had not informed anyone I was seriously considering quitting medical school so was surprised when during the ceremony the medicine man prayed for me to finish my medical training as he felt it was important for the health of our People. I had cut my hair to go to this conservative institution and this was a huge stress for me. The medicine man gave me a vision and I could see myself working with Indian people and I had my long hair back. Traditionally our healers did not cut their hair as it was felt that cutting the hair would lessen their spiritual gift of healing. This vision came true. I was able to finish my medical training and was able to cross paths with many traditional healers from many tribes who taught me many things. My talk speaks about my journey, the cultural barriers I experienced, and how I have been able to incorporate my Traditional ways into my practice of Western Medicine. I teach in the traditional way of our people, with stories.

Biography

David Baines MD received his medical degree from the Mayo Medical School and he is Board Certified in Family Medicine. He was in private practice for fourteen years on the Coeur d Alene Indian Reservation in northern Idaho and was Clinical Director of the Nez Perce Tribal Clinic in Kamiah, Idaho for one year. He worked at the Seattle Indian Health Board, an urban Indian clinic, which also was a Family Practice Residency site, for two years and spent 4 years working in Dutch Harbor, Alaska at the ILIULIUK Family and Health Services. Currently he is a faculty physician at the Alaska Family Practice Residency, which is part of the University of Washington residency network and sits on the Clinical Pastoral Education Committee which has oversight over the chaplain training programs at Providence Hospital. He has been president of the Association of American Indian Physicians and held other board positions as well. He chaired the Ad Hoc Committee on Minority Populations at the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and was on the Advisory Committee of the Center of Research on Minority Health at NIH. He was on the Secretary's Advisory Committee on Infant Mortality at the Health Resources and Services Administration and is a Full Professor of Medicine in the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Washington. Currently he is on the Advisory Board of the National Center for Minority Health and Health Disparities at the National Institutes of Health.

Dr Baines is the recipient of the 2012 American Indian Physician of the Year Award given by the Association of American Indian Physicians, the 1993 Gentle Giant of Medicine Award from G.D. Searle & Company and was selected for the 1995 United States Public Health Service Primary Care Fellowship. He also received the 1997 Founders Award for Community Service in Health and Medicine from the National Medical Fellowships. He has been a consultant for the American Academy of Family Physicians, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Academy of Sciences, and the Department of Health and Human Services. He has written in medical journals and has several chapters in medical texts.

Dr. Baines is a member of the Tlingit and Tsimshian tribes of Alaska and frequently lectures on how he incorporates his culture and traditional beliefs into his practice of modern medicine. Special interests are teaching, mentoring, medical politics and policy development, cardiology, emergency medicine and obstetrics. Recreationally he enjoys spending time with his family, traditional dancing at pow wows, photography, hunting, fishing, and traveling.