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**NURSE-TURNED-MEDICAL STUDENT WINS 2019 AMA  
 INDIGENOUS MEDICAL SCHOLARSHIP**

**2019 AMA NATIONAL CONFERENCE - #amanatcon  
 Sofitel Brisbane, 24-26 May 2019**

A Darwin medical student with a long-term plan to work in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory is the recipient of the 2019 AMA Indigenous Medical Scholarship.

Nikki Kastellorizios, a second-year medical student in the Flinders University NT Medical Program and mother of three, says her aim is to become the kind of doctor she would want her family to encounter when they need medical attention.

AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, presented Nikki Kastellorizios with the award at the AMA National Conference today.

Her passion for medicine stems from experiencing and witnessing the barriers and difficulties Indigenous people face when accessing health care.

“I am a registered nurse, and chose to become a doctor as I feel I will have greater influence in making real change towards closing the gap that Indigenous Australians – my people – currently experience,” Ms Kastellorizios said.

“Through my encounters accessing health care, and acting as a support person for family members, I have recognised the profound impact people’s experiences have on their health choices.

“Indigenous people who deal with culturally unaware professionals or services will often choose to avoid them in the future, and live with their deteriorating health, rather than try to access services that are not meeting their needs.

“I recognise that as an individual, I can’t change the world, but I can help to facilitate change in someone’s life, and subsequently their wider community, by building a therapeutic, culturally safe relationship based on trust and mutual respect.

“I hope our common heritage will give Indigenous patients a sense of ease, allowing me to be better able to holistically treat patients and help them improve their health, on their terms.”

Ms Kastellorizios has a long-term plan to be part of the movement to improve Indigenous health.

“Post medical school, my 10-year plan is to work towards becoming a Fellow in my field, and to be the doctor I would want my family to encounter when needing medical help,” she said.

“My 15-year-plus plan is to work in rural and remote areas of the Northern territory once my children are grown up. While most Indigenous Australians live in metropolitan or regional areas, the most disadvantaged live in rural or remote Australia, and they need the most help.”

“Throughout my journey, I also want to support and inspire other Indigenous people to become involved in the health sciences in whatever role they choose – health worker, nurse, doctor – to further empower families and communities.

“Every First Nations Australian who reaches for further education can create belief in the young, and others, that it is achievable.”

Dr Bartone said that Ms Kastellorizios is a deserving recipient of the \$10,000 a year Scholarship.

“Ms Kastellorizios has a clear determination to help improve the lives and health of Indigenous Australians,” Dr Bartone said.

“Her dedication and commitment in taking on a medical degree while bringing up three young children is commendable, as is her desire to inspire Indigenous youth to strive for higher education.

“Latest records show that there are about 500 Indigenous doctors in the medical workforce, which is about 0.4 per cent of the workforce. To reach population parity of 3 per cent, the number should be closer to 3500.

“In 2017, a total of 310 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students were enrolled in universities across Australia.

“We know that Indigenous people have a greater chance of improved health outcomes when they are treated by Indigenous doctors and health professionals. They are more likely to make and keep appointments when they are confident that they will be treated by someone who understands their culture, their language, and their unique circumstances.

“Ms Kastellorizios will be exactly that kind of doctor.”

The AMA Indigenous Medical Scholarship was established in 1994 with a contribution from the Commonwealth Government. The AMA is seeking further donations and sponsorships from individuals and corporations to continue this important contribution to Indigenous health.

Donations are tax-deductible and can be made online at <https://indigenousscholarship.ama.com.au/>

The AMA thanks BB & A Miller Fund, a sub-fund of the Australian Communities Foundation, for funding the 2019 Scholarship.

For enquiries, please contact the AMA via email at [indigenousscholarship@ama.com.au](mailto:indigenousscholarship@ama.com.au) or phone (02) 6270 5400.

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