

# Jamie-Lee Rahiri

## Born where and when

Tokoroa, 1989; Ko Hikuranga, Ruapehu me Tokatoka tōku maunga; ko Waiapu, Whanganui me Wairoa ngā awa; ko Hiruharama, Naumai me [other marae] tōku marae; ko Ngāti Porou, Ngāti Whātua ki Kaipara me Te Atihaunui-a-Pāpārangi tōku iwi.

## School

Tokoroa East Primary School, Maungawhau Primary and Northcote College in Auckland.

“In Auckland I was one of few Māori and racism was much more explicit. One kid told me several times from when I was seven that ‘If it wasn’t for us, you Māori would still be running around in grass skirts’. It was an awakening for me.”

## How she got into science

“My mum did a science degree as a mature student and took me to some of her lectures; it was like a stadium classroom. I had loved going to see my GP in Tokoroa but I never thought it was possible for me to become a doctor. They were all old white men, I thought I could only visit. Mum gave me some medical encyclopedias - I didn’t understand them but I read them and pretended I knew what it was about. I thought if I could read these books, I could be a doctor. I liked the idea of meeting new people, families and children all day, I thought I could do that. I also loved chemistry, mixing potions.”

## Her training

**MBChB**, Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery, 2014; **PhD** in Surgery, University of Auckland.

**Junior doctor**, Manukau DHB, Auckland  
**Senior Surgical Registrar**, Waitemata DHB.

“By 6th form I wanted to be a doctor, I pestered friends of mine in waka ama who were doctors or had whānau at medical school. One of them took me through the Med school. Māori were very generous, they felt a responsibility for teina.”

“After I started my PhD I met a Pākehā surgeon who said Māori didn’t deserve to be doctors or surgeons, and their bad choices caused their health problems. Racism in surgery wasn’t being discussed, so I changed my PhD to focus on it.”

## Field of science

Surgery, equity, Māori health.

“People’s results after surgery are determined more by what support patients have access to than by the quality of the operation.”

## Research topics

Bariatric and hernia surgery, disparities in general surgical care.

“Equal access to health care for Māori is a problem at all the steps towards and after surgery.”

## How she finds things out

Auditing the history of operations in a hospital; studies of large population groups; systematic reviews (analyses of all the research studies about a topic); statistical analysis; interviews and pūrakau.

“Interviews adds richness to data and provides the voice of those we’re studying; they help us understand how events effect people, and tell us whether processes are working.”

*Jamie-Lee with two of her tamariki at the Blue Spring, Waikato.*



## Most valuable results

“Māori have higher rates of obesity and diabetes, but get fewer bariatric (stomach-stapling weight loss) surgeries, the only current cure for diabetes. Bariatric surgery patients I interviewed wanted kaupapa Māori solutions, they don't want to be blamed for going to a lot of tangi. They need bariatric mentors, psychologists and support as part of their communities.”

“Patients experience racism from surgeons, and we need to clean that up. We need more Māori doctors and Māori dietitians. There are unnecessary barriers for Māori – patients shouldn't have to prove they deserve bariatric surgery by losing 20kg first, when it makes no difference to results.”

## Mātauranga Maori

“Everything about the system I work in is antagonistic to Mātauranga Māori, but manaakitanga, aroha, and whakawhanaungatanga are central to my work. My focus is on advocacy and structural criticism, not yet on kaupapa Māori solutions. I'm one of the few Māori surgery researchers - that's not enough. There

## Ngā Kupu

**Aroha** – Love, empathy

**Awa** – River

**Heke haere te tinana** – To lose weight

**Kaupapa Māori** – Maori customary practice

**Manaakitanga** – Hospitality, care

**Mana taurite** – Equity

**Mātauranga Māori** – Maori knowledge, wisdom

**Mate huka** – Diabetes

**Maunga** – Mountain

**Mōmona** – Obesity, richness, fertility

**Poka** (-ia,-na) – To operate on, surgery

**Puku** – Stomach

**Pūrākau** – Ancient stories

**Tākuta poka** – Surgeon

**Teina** – Younger relative, juniors

**Whakawhanaungatanga** – Building relationships

From Te Aka Maori Dictionary



*Jamie-Lee in the University of Auckland 2014 Māori and Pacific Success Vision 20:20 - Health Career Pathways prospectus*

are some wonderful kaupapa Māori lifestyle programmes about weight loss and fitness. We need those solutions everywhere, so ideally no one would need bariatric surgery.”

## What she likes about science

“It's just fun! Surgery is a science and an art. To take out an appendix you have to understand how the body works, and be able to listen and talk with people to find solutions together. I was nervous and scared before my first operation by myself, but when I finished I was so exhilarated. Science is such a privileged type of work and very wide-ranging, from laboratory work to gathering community stories.”

“Don't be shy to reach out to Māori people who are already doing science - we all want more Māori to come through, and providing support is not annoying.”

## Link

- [University of Auckland PhD interview](#)



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