Most approaches addressing contemporary medical practices of Native North Americans are either rooted in a critique of modernity or aim at modernization. Working with the central concepts of "risk" and "vulnerability", this kind of non-reflexive and problem-oriented research focuses on the precariousness of contemporary Native American life, on risky lifestyles and dangerous behavior.

That leaves a lot of space to wonder. Apart from putting themselves "at risk" with their "behavior", what do native people actually do when it comes to medicine? How do they do what they do, and to what ends? What do they think about what they do? – And how can anthropology address this doing epistemologically?

What benefits would the discipline gain from an approach that substitutes the term "behavior" with the term "practice", and looks at how these practices constitute the field of medicine in native north America? In my talk, I will use ethnographic examples from tribal communities in the American Upper Midwest to show how much more complex and subtle the relationship between tribal sovereignty and cooperation in medicine can be today.