



Indian Health Service Tucson Awards Ceremony

June 5, 2009

Welcoming Remarks

By

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Director, Indian Health Service

Good afternoon everyone. Dorothy, thank you for that kind introduction. I would like to thank you for the invitation to speak at this important award celebration. This is my first opportunity as the Director of IHS to be a keynote speaker in person, and I'm delighted to be here today to honor and recognize those who have demonstrated the highest level of performance, dedication, and commitment in service to those we serve. I also want to acknowledge the fabulous efforts of the members of the planning team who have worked so hard to make this event possible.

The text is the basis of Dr. Roubideaux's oral remarks at the Tucson Area Awards Ceremony on June 5, 2009. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

We are here today to honor those who have done extraordinary work in furthering our mission of raising the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native people to the highest possible level. Over the years we have all seen some truly heroic efforts, as well as a lot of just plain hard work, on the part of IHS and tribal employees as they worked daily to improve the health and welfare of Indian people. We also know that much of this work and progress does not get the acknowledgment it deserves, and that many highly committed, capable, and extremely dedicated employees often go unrecognized. That is why I consider it such a pleasure and honor to be here today to participate in the recognition of these dedicated and deserving awardees. Their efforts, along with all of their colleagues past and present, are responsible for the many significant improvements that have been made in Indian health care over the years.

I would like to start by recognizing seven outstanding individuals who have given a total of **275 years** to improving the health and well-being of Indian people! Thank you, Angela Martinez, for your incredible 50 years of service. Ms. Martinez is one of our many dedicated nurses who daily serve on the front lines of health care in Indian Country. And thank you, Delphine Joaquin, Ruby Lopez, Annie Miguel, and Linda Sanchez for your incredible 40 years of dedicated service; and thank you, Loretta Pablo and Irma Enis, for your 35 and 30 years of service.

I would like to also congratulate all the recipients of the Commissioned Corps Honor Awards. These prestigious awards recognize officers for outstanding achievement or service. There are nine officers receiving awards, and I commend each of you for your exemplary service.

Now...I want to acknowledge some of the examples of individual and group accomplishments being honored here today. These employees have modeled our ideal of quality, customer-friendly, team-oriented, and service-focused health care. An example of this team spirit and commitment is seen in the efforts of the Sells Service Unit Women's Health Fair Planning committee. They are the largest team being recognized today; their membership includes tribal community members and IHS health professionals – a wonderful example of IHS and tribal collaboration. This 15-member team of women is being recognized for their collaborative efforts toward improving women's physical, mental, and spiritual health through a one-day community event focused upon patient-centered, customer-friendly care in an enthusiastic and welcoming environment. They were able to complete 41 women's health examinations and 61 mammograms **in one day**. The fair also provides patients with valuable educational tools and resources to improve women's health.

Other examples of the many extraordinary efforts being honored here today include the continued work of Monica Lopez, a registered dietitian, and Marlene Saraficio, a community health educator. They were instrumental in the formation

of the Tohono O’odham Taking Ownership Wellness Coalition, which supports the mission and vision of the Sells Service Unit in addressing childhood obesity among Tohono O’odham children.

I also want to mention the exemplary spirit, commitment, and professionalism demonstrated by the staff of the *Apedag Ju:ki ki*¹, Healing Rain House, for their leadership in the Innovations in Planned Care site at the San Xavier Health Center. This team has become the model at Sells Service Unit, and a model nationally, for the provision of patient-centered care. The team is recognized for their individual contributions in forming a strong care team whose efforts in advancing the Innovations in Planned Care initiative has begun to produce measurable results.

One of my priorities as Director of IHS is to increase collaboration with Tribes. I strongly believe that IHS efforts to improve health care delivery and address health care disparities can only be accomplished through close collaboration with tribal leadership and tribal programs. One such program in the Tucson Area is the Archie Hendricks Skilled Nursing Center – recipient of the prestigious CMS Five-Star Rating. We honor this program today and recognize the efforts of the staff, the Board, and that of the Tohono O’odham Nation in having

¹ Pronounced *Āp'-ō-dăk Jū-k Kē* - or you can just say “Healing Rain House”

the vision and the commitment to bring together the resources necessary to establish and build this Center, which provides such needed care for its members. The Five-Star rating bestowed on the Archie Hendricks Nursing Center is rare; in fact, there were only four other skilled nursing homes in the Arizona that have received this rating.

These are only a few examples of the accomplishments of those being recognized today. I want to extend my personal congratulations to each and every one of you, including the many I have not mentioned specifically. I thank all of the recipients of awards here today for their special efforts and contributions in support of the IHS mission and in service to the Tohono O'odham, Pascua Yaqui, and other American Indians and Alaska Native people. You have all contributed "above and beyond" what was required of you, and represent the high quality of professional staff that comprises the Indian Health Service.

I would like to take a moment to say a few words on my priorities for the future direction of the Indian Health Service. Every one of you here today, and all IHS employees across the nation, will have a vital part in accomplishing these goals, and I know you will be bringing your usual best efforts and exceptional skills to the table. Stated simply, my top four areas of emphasis for the IHS are:

- To renew and strengthen the partnership with Tribes and improve the tribal consultation process;

- To bring reform to the IHS in the context of national health reform;
- To improve the quality and access to care for patients who are served by IHS; and
- To have everything we do be as transparent, fair, and inclusive as possible.

We will use these goals to help us address the ongoing health disparities that have plagued American Indians and Alaska Natives for too long, and to address the present and emerging crises of chronic conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, obesity, and injuries. We will also work with Tribes to tackle the difficult and heartbreaking problems of suicide and substance abuse in our Indian communities, particularly among our vulnerable youth. These issues require addressing an entire spectrum of socioeconomic, psychological, judicial, and political issues, as well as individual lifestyle changes. We must work to coordinate resources across a broad range of federal, private, and educational agencies and organizations in order to effectively address these complex issues.

I am confident that through the efficient use of all available resources and the dedication, talents, and skills of IHS and tribal health care workers, we will continue to make great strides in improving health care for Indian people. I welcome your help and support in the months and years to come in fulfilling this goal.

I again congratulate each and every one of you for your ongoing and tireless efforts to improve health care for American Indian and Alaska Native people. I believe IHS employees are among the finest health professionals in this nation. I know I am proud to have this opportunity to be part of this awards ceremony and to meet and talk with some of you here today. I salute each of you for the wonderful work that you do every day.

Thank you.