



Nursing Leaders in Native Care Conference

August 15-19, 2011

*The Future of the Indian Health Service
and the Way Forward for Native Nursing Leaders*

by

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Good morning. I am Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, Director of the Indian Health Service (IHS). It is a pleasure to be here with you today by videoconference. I am sorry I am unable to join you in person. I would like to start by thanking everyone who helped make this conference possible. I reviewed the agenda and it looks great! I especially like the focus on leadership. We need your leadership to help change and improve the IHS.

I will be speaking with you today about how nursing is a key part of the future of the Indian Health Service and what we are doing at the IHS to improve healthcare services for American Indian and Alaska Native people. Additionally, I want to emphasize the importance of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) report titled *"The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health."*

I appreciate the work and dedication of the over 5,000 members of the nursing staff in our IHS, tribal, and urban Indian health programs. I have seen and been impressed with the way our nurses work to treat every patient with dignity and respect and as an individual and a human being, rather than just another medical case. Being a good nurse requires not only extensive medical knowledge and expertise, but also the compassion and emotional strength to deal with patients at the most vulnerable times of their lives, in a sensitive and culturally appropriate manner. I believe our nurses are especially adept at these skills. Their ability to handle a wide variety of physical, mental, and emotional problems as well as help patients, families, and communities strive towards health and wellness is remarkable. An essential to maintaining a highly qualified and efficient nursing work force is the strong and effective leadership that you provide as nurse leaders. The future of IHS includes you as vital members of our team.

I would like to provide a brief update on our agency priorities. As many of you may know, the four IHS priorities we have set to guide our work already are changing and improving the IHS. Tribal leaders and patients tell me firsthand that they are seeing improvements in customer service and other areas.

Our first priority is to renew and strengthen our partnership with Tribes. I have stated many times that I believe the only way we are going to improve the health of our communities is to work in partnership with them.

We have done a lot to improve consultation at the national level. I held Area listening sessions with all 12 IHS Areas this year and last year, either in person or by phone or videoconference. I have held over 300 tribal delegation meetings, and I regularly meet with tribal advisory groups and workgroups and attend tribal meetings.

And we just held a Tribal Consultation Summit that was a “one stop shop” for Tribes to learn about all the consultation activities in IHS. We are now focusing on making improvements to consultation at the Area and local levels.

I believe we will be so much more successful if we work in partnership with Tribes and our communities. Our Tribes, as sovereign nations, are responsible for the health and wellbeing of their members, and we can do so much more working with them. Nurses are a vital part of this priority, as many of our nurses, including our public health nurses, work closely with our communities.

Our second priority, “to bring reform to the IHS,” has two parts – the first part includes passage of the health reform law, the Affordable Care Act, and the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. The second part is about internal IHS reform – how we are changing and improving the organization.

We are grateful for passage of the Affordable Care Act because it will make quality, affordable healthcare accessible to all Americans, including our First Americans. It is designed to increase access to health insurance, help those who have insurance, and reduce healthcare costs.

The focus of this past year has been on access to health insurance, with many new insurance reforms. The Affordable Care Act has the potential to benefit American Indian and Alaska Native individuals and Tribes, and IHS, tribal, and urban Indian health facilities. Greater access to health insurance will help individuals, in terms of more coverage and choices, and our health facilities, in terms of reimbursements.

The Indian Health Care Improvement Act was included in the Affordable Care Act – which is great for Indian Country because this law is the main legislation that authorizes Congress to fund health care services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. And it *permanently* reauthorizes the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. This Act updates and modernizes the IHS. The provisions are numerous, but many of them give IHS new authorities,

I am encouraging everyone in the Indian health system to learn everything they can about this important new law and its impact on Indian health care. We just sent a letter to Tribes with a table that summarizes the provisions and our progress in implementation.

The next part of our second priority is about bringing internal reform to the IHS. In order to get the support we dearly need, the IHS must demonstrate a willingness to change and improve. It is clear that Tribes, staff, and our patients want change. By internal IHS reform, I mean we need to look at what we do well, and be honest about where we need to improve.

We requested and received tribal and staff priorities on how to change and improve the IHS. Overall, staff emphasized improving the way we do business and how we lead and manage our staff.

I've sent messages to IHS staff on improving our business and management practices – such as the importance of customer service, ethics, performance management, and professionalism. Many of our staff members want improvements in these areas, and our work starts with a strong message from the top that these are important areas for all of us.

To improve the way we do business, we're working with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and our Area Directors to improve how we manage and plan our budgets and improve our financial management. We're working to make our business practices more consistent and effective throughout the system.

We are working on specific activities to improve the hiring process by making it more efficient and less time-consuming. This means that hiring staff and supervisors need to work together to help make the process more efficient and effective. We have also been making improvements to our performance management system to improve accountability.

Our third priority is to improve the quality of and access to care. Improving customer service is the most important activity for us as we move forward, and I am seeing some great new activities throughout the system. However, we still have much to do in this area and I hope you can continue to help us improve our customer service.

The Improving Patient Care initiative is an important part of how IHS will make progress on this priority. This is our patient-centered medical home initiative. Nurses are a vital part of this initiative. Nurses and clerks are making appropriate referrals for timely health maintenance screening; nurses and provider staff are working together to develop appropriate guidelines and protocols to improve access; and nurse case managers are being used to help patients manage their illness and navigate the health care system in the most efficient manner. And the lessons learned at the pilot sites are being shared across the Indian health system for others to use.

Our journey toward a patient-centered medical home strategy is dependent on the leadership of our nursing leaders. Your encouragement and support of our patients in the self-management of their own health and wellness is a key element in the future of an improved Indian health system. As we learn more about improving access to care, you can accelerate our progress by building awareness, knowledge, and excitement among your staff members.

Other patient care initiatives include the IHS Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative. The purpose of this initiative is to promote breastfeeding to improve infant health and help reduce obesity. We also just launched the Healthy Weight for Life initiative, which will unify all our efforts to promote a healthy weight among American Indians and Alaska Natives across the lifespan. We now have a website with information on evidence-based, proven approaches to help fight the obesity epidemic that is threatening the health and well-being of Indian people.

And the recent 2-year extension of the Special Diabetes Program for Indians will help us continue the successful activities of this program. They have demonstrated that in partnership with our communities, we can reduce diabetes and cardiovascular disease risk factors in Indian Country with innovative and culturally appropriate activities.

The new Partnership for Patients that was recently launched will help reduce harm by focusing on reducing hospital acquired conditions and hospital readmissions. We will be working on this initiative soon.

All of these initiatives certainly require and depend on the involvement and support of nurses in our hospitals and communities. We cannot effectively implement them without your support and input.

As we examine the future of Native nursing leadership today, we need to focus on improving the quality of and access to care for our patients. More and more we see nurses taking the lead in developing and implementing innovative ways to improve patient outcomes and increase access to care.

For instance, nurses are also a vital part of our efforts to integrate behavioral health care services with overall medical services, which is an important IHS goal. And while we often think of health care in terms of inpatient and outpatient services, we sometimes forget that the patient's environment at home and in the community plays just as significant a role in their health and wellness.

Our public health nurses are the most in tune with services in the community and beyond, so they are in the best position to help patients and families navigate the health care system and access their community resources.

Our fourth priority is to make everything transparent, accountable, fair, and inclusive. These principles guide our work and decision-making. I have been communicating more, including messages from the Director and my director's blog. I encourage you to check my blog on a regular basis for the most updated information on IHS activities and initiatives

Accountability for individual and program performance is important. In order to get the support we need, we have to demonstrate that our activities result in improved outcomes – for local programs and for the system as a whole.

I do see nurses as an important part of the future of IHS. With your leadership, we can change and improve the IHS for the better. Certainly, the IOM report, “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health,” gives some great messages that can help us along the way.

I know that the National Nursing Leadership Council is seeking to increase awareness of the IOM report because it could be helpful as the IHS works to improve the quality and access to care.

The report emphasized that if we are to end up with both better health as a nation and a better health care system, the involvement of registered nurses is essential. The report makes recommendations for an action-oriented blueprint for the future of nursing. The key messages derived from the report are that:

- Nurses should practice to the full extent of their education and training;
- Nurses should achieve higher levels of education and training through an improved education system that promotes seamless academic progression;
- Nurses should be full partners with physicians and other health care professionals in redesigning health care in the United States; and
- Effective workforce planning and policy making require better data collection and information infrastructure.

I hope you have a chance to discuss this report at your meetings and incorporate its findings into the work you do. As we change and improve the IHS, improve the way we do business and provide better quality services, I know that nurses will be an essential part of these changes. As leaders of our largest workforce, I am relying on each and every one of you to help us achieve high-quality customer service, care, and access. We need you to ensure that evidence-based practice is a part of everyday care, and that care is delivered in a culturally competent manner.

Overall, we are beginning to make progress on our priorities and are moving forward on the challenging work to change and improve the IHS. While changing and improving the IHS may seem like a daunting and challenging task, I still believe we're in a unique time in history, where we have a supportive President and administration, including lots of support at HHS, and bipartisan support in Congress for reform. We must take advantage of this opportunity to change and improve the IHS. A lot of the support we have now is based on our willingness to demonstrate that we are changing and improving.

Thank you for all that you are doing to help us change and improve the IHS. Our efforts to change and improve have never been more important. Thank you for your partnership – we all contribute to a better future for IHS and the patients we serve. Have a great rest of the meeting!