Cancer has crept among us...the Natives. I never realized that any of my family or anyone in my community would be affected by this. My husband was diagnosed with cancer of the esophagus. They told us he had six months to live. Six months was too short. He didn't live that long. He died on June 1st of that year, 2000. Then my daughter, who is 52 years old now, she was diagnosed with first breast cancer. And then they took care of it. They treated her. She was okay, and then a year later, she was diagnosed again with cervical cancer. This was the hardest for her. She got over it. She survived. The hardest is my son, Chuck. He was diagnosed with brain cancer in January, 2005. His cancer didn't last very long. We knew that we would lose him so we were there with him all the time, every day, my son and my daughters and myself. He was diagnosed in January and by then by February 22, he died from cancer. I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer in October of 2006. November 28, I had surgery and had my left thyroid removed. And then, January 10, 2007, I had my right thyroid removed and I had radiation treatments. I'm a survivor. And that is why I am very, very concerned about why, why it's attacking my family. It's just too much.

Linda is not alone. Her story is heard in many families, in many tribes, on many reservations and in many cities. It is everyone's story. It is the story of why both spiritual health and physical health are culturally important to American Indians seeking cancer care. The goal is to provide a greater understanding of how spiritual care can be integrated with modern medicine in a cancer care program for American Indians and to identify ways in which people with cancer and their families can be supported spiritually. The role of spiritual care in cancer treatment is really a basic function in terms of the care of cancer. One of the things all cancer patients have to deal with is their mental outlook and the word all providers say to people who have been diagnosed with cancer or are going through cancer treatment is maintain a positive outlook. This is a very important part of what will help them address their cancer. For the American Indian, this is even more important because their lives revolve around many cultural aspects of their being. The traditional beliefs and teachings and their way of life is really integrated into the spiritualness of themselves. To be able to maintain their strong spiritual attitude and meeting their spiritual needs is important to dealing with illness. The American Indian looks in terms of wholeness. The spiritual aspect is just as important as the physical and mental. The spiritual aspect is very much an integrated and comprehensive approach that American Indians have. To not have that part of one's dealing with illness and with healing is missing a very important part of their life, outlook and beliefs. This has to be a part of any healing process for the American Indian. Another big and important difference is that in traditional medicine, we understood that the health of the community impacts the health of the family. The health of the family impacts the health of the individual. If we're only focused on care for individuals and not incorporating family and community in the healing process, we're missing a big part of the picture when we look at issues in Indian health. Working two systems of health care together, traditional medicine with conventional medicine is very empowering. Certain dynamics happen internally with patients that we can't explain but they obviously have good outcomes for the patient. The spirit, I define as the attitudes, the emotions, the psychological state of an individual in dealing with their disease process. Being diagnosed with cancer has a devastating impact on any patient's life. It drills down to the very spirit, the soul of that person. I've seen cases where patients diagnosed with cancer or undergoing treatments, when the spirit is alive and full of hope, there's a change in the whole process of treatment.

Health is not really just about physical well-being. It also incorporates spiritual health. I've seen patients who have been diagnosed with stage four disease, with metastases, on feeding tubes and having lost 50 pounds, when you sit by their bedside, there's a gleam in their eyes and a smile that shows that the person is healthy from a spiritual perspective. It helps them deal with illness and the treatments, but they're also an inspiration to their family and friends and an inspiration to the doctor. I can certainly say there's been so many times I've been at the bedside of dying patients who have cancer and these people really inspire me. They make me feel happy. They make me feel hopeful. It's not because of the physical disease of their body but because of the spiritual health they exhibit and they show to others. So it is critically important in Native American thinking, the way we look at life - it is really about mind and body and spirit. It's the spiritual component and whatever way they can access it, whatever way they can develop it, whatever way they can support it, really will benefit the patient, the family and the doctor, too. I've been able to work with a lot of the traditional healers and medicine men. I've found it very effective to have a team of traditional healers I can consult with, like I consult a cardiologist for heart disease or a pulmonologist for lung disease, I consult with the traditional healers when there needs to be more of a holistic and spiritual healing process. There are patients I've done this with very directly. Not necessarily everybody survives the diagnosis of cancer, but, in the traditional way, I've seen a healthier approach, even to the dying process. In Lakota, when I was younger, I learned there is a concept of dying healed. In truth, all of us, eventually, will go through the dying process. In modern medicine, we tend to view death as the ending and the enemy. This is the enemy that we try to fight, and this is an unhealthy approach for the provider and families because it is inevitable that eventually we will die. Focusing on dying healed is what's important and that is the spiritual realm.

It's important to remember not all Native people focus on traditional perspectives. There's a broad spectrum of American Indians, there are people who are very traditional and those who are very non-traditional. Spiritual experience, just like dealing with a disease, is a very personal process. I would encourage anyone, whether they have a traditional belief system or a more modern religious belief system, it's important to incorporate that belief into the healing process. Hopefully, you are working with a provider who understands and is open to that. I encourage you to talk to your provider about your spiritual needs as well. One of the goals in Indian Health Service is to promote spiritual well-being for our American Indian patients and their families. It is part of the mission of our facility. Our patients receive spiritual care through the work of two committees, the Volunteer Chaplains' Association and also our Traditional Cultural Advocacy Committee. Our Volunteer Chaplains' Association has 6 to 8 individuals who provide services. They come from a wide variety of affiliations and denominations. Our Traditional Cultural Advocacy Committee is made up of American Indian practitioners, community members and many of our staff who promote the spiritual and cultural understanding of the patients that we serve here. There are many ways within American Indian understandings to provide spiritual care or where spiritual well-being happens. We honor that on campus by providing sweats through our sweat lodge. Our Traditional Practice Committee has sweat lodge providers. There are regular sweats our patients and community members can participate in. There's also opportunities at our hospital where blessing or smudging ceremonies need to take place to restore balance and bring healing to patients, staff, our whole community here. We also have powwows that happen through our Employees Association. where we gather as a community and dance and sing songs and honor one another. Not

only generations here with us, but generations who have passed on, and also the hope for future generations. My Dad's greatest fear of going to doctors and keeping his appointments was that one day he was going to go and the doctor was going to tell him he had cancer and there would be nothing they could do for him. When we did encounter that, then that was that struggle, Now where do we turn to emotionally and spiritually? I know right then and there that his heart just sank, I just know it did. He never said, but I knew him well enough to know in all his quietness, that he was really thinking about what it meant for him now. I think, if anything, he wished that his wife could have been here to be with him. He really leaned on my mother all of his life; she was his greatest assurance. But with her not being there, he turned to us, my sister and I, his daughters. And he leaned on us and I knew that because he could say to us "I'm scared." And we'd say to him, "It's okay, Dad, it'll be okay. We're scared, too, but we'll get through this together." The emotions he went through were from disappointment to joy to disappointment. And I think, at the very end, it finally got to an acceptance that last month. He finally just accepted it and was able to live that day-to-day living. The community is really where we found our support, the community being the congregation members or it's a town or a village, those individuals that surround your life, whatever that community is named. For us, it was the church where our support came for our spiritual and emotional strength. My sister and I, as most people do, have a hard time asking for help. That's not something we do easily. And yet we learned we had to ask for help because we couldn't do it alone. It was our church community that gave us support and prayers, their presence that gave us the strength that allowed us to walk with Dad on his journey.

My name is Lois Steele and I'm a cancer survivor. I was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2004 with eleven positive nodes. so I didn't have that good an outlook but I'm doing well. I'm an enrolled member of the Fort Peck Assiniboine Sioux Tribe from Montana and I'm a board-certified family practice physician. These are three aspects of my life that influence me that I am going to discuss now. You have to look at your own spiritual well-being; no one else is going to. Spiritual well-being is the essential aspect to one's journey in healing. You have to figure out who you are. It's somewhat existentialist to even say that. You have to figure out who you are- mother, grandmother, tap dancer, physician- what makes you happy and fulfilled and then concentrate on being happy. Studies have shown that the people who are happy actually survive longer. Seek out places that are going to keep your spiritual well-being. I go to the Sun Dance every year on my reservation. I surround myself with familiar faces, with family, with friends, with people I care about and who care about me. We all try to heal one another. We all try to work together to make the Sun Dance work. If you don't nurture your sense of humor, you're not going to make it. It's going to carry you many times when you can laugh about something rather than cry. You have to learn to laugh at yourself. Don't laugh at others, but laugh at yourself. Learn to see humor in the tough situations. Live life to the fullest. Take the risks to change. Change anything that's not working. Try to understand and adapt to physical changes that inevitably will occur. Maybe not from the cancer, maybe from old age or anything. We're going to have to be able to handle those changes. In order to keep the spirit strong, we have to understand that changes will occur. We're going to have to change with it, but we need to control those changes. I think the most important thing I learned in my own traditional medicine training is traditional values like fortitude, wisdom, generosity, courage, honor, respect, and humility. Those are the seven core values in the Lakota way. The most important is humility. It was said best by Black Elk when he said: Of course it was not I who cured. It was the power from the Outer World

and the visions and ceremonies that had only made me like a hole through which the power could come to the two-leggeds. If I thought that I was doing it myself, the hole would close up and no power could come through. It's very important to remember this lesson because he's talking about humility and, in the traditional belief system, when you lose your humility, you lose your ability to heal.