



Indian Health Information Management Conference
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Welcoming Remarks

by

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Good morning. It is a pleasure to be here today to wish you a successful and productive 2008 Indian Health Information Management Conference. I've looked over the agenda, and it is certainly comprehensive - everything from an "Overview of the IHS Network Operations and Security Center" to a presentation entitled "Laugh As though Your Life Depended on it!" I think we could all use a dose of laughter these days.

We've all come to appreciate how essential information technology is to effective, high quality health care delivery and efficient resource management in the IHS. Health care is information-intensive and increasingly dependent on technology to ensure that appropriate information is available whenever and wherever it is needed.

The future of our health system requires continuing evolution and adaptation to address historic and emerging health challenges. Future success requires that we continue to consider a broad array of options, and almost all of them depend on a strong health information technology system. The IHS IT program represents an important and vital investment in the future of health care delivery. I have seen many changes in the IT infrastructure in the Indian health system over the years, as health information technology has become more and more prominent and vital to the delivery of quality health care.

We continue to improve our IT infrastructure to support Presidential, HHS, and IHS goals and priorities. Federal initiatives, such as the Nationwide Health Information Network, will dramatically improve our ability to exchange health care information. HHS enterprise initiatives are modernizing administrative operations throughout the Department. The HHS priority to accelerate the adoption of IT in health care will reduce medical errors and improve health care quality. The IHS Electronic Health Record, iCARE, telehealth applications and other IHS

initiatives that will be discussed during this conference amply demonstrate our commitment to improving all aspects of our Indian health information technology program.

Those of you who are here today represent the very best and the most important part of our IT infrastructure. You direct and operate our computers and communication systems and implement the security that supports every aspect of the IHS mission. Our health information technology is fully integrated with the agency's programs, and is critical to improving service delivery across the Indian health care system. We work together – federal, tribal and urban program staff – in pursuit of our common mission.

The IHS program is working with Tribes and other organizations to leverage existing resources and to further enhance information systems to allow better clinical practice management and administrative reporting systems at all sites, however rural and isolated. Local, regional, and national planning can ensure appropriate and efficient IT application and IT-supported health innovation throughout the system.

Before I close, I would like to share with you some comments Secretary Leavitt made before the Nationwide Health Information Network Forum yesterday that I believe encapsulate the future of health information technology:

Resolving privacy concerns will be critical to greater health information technology and its ability to improve the quality of medical care while reducing costs and eliminating medical errors. . . . It is also important to limit the collection, use, and disclosure of personal health information, and consumers should decide how that information is shared. It's not the technology that's going to limit us. It's the sociology.

Again, welcome to this conference, and thank you for all of the important and innovative work you're doing on behalf of the American Indian and Alaska Native people we serve.