



Indian Health Service
Albuquerque Area Awards Ceremony
April 28, 2006

Keynote Remarks

by

Dr. Charles W. Grim, D.D.S., M.H.S.A.

Assistant Surgeon General
Director, Indian Health Service

Welcome to the Albuquerque Area's Awards ceremony. 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. Last year brought particularly difficult challenges to the IHS staff with the Red Lake shootings and the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We should all be extremely proud of how the IHS stood up to these challenges. Presiding over the 2005 awards for the Albuquerque Area and recognizing our dedicated and highly deserving award winners is a duty that I look forward to and appreciate as Director of the Indian Health Service.

The recipients of this year's awards represent the high quality of professional staff that comprises the Indian Health Service. Their innovative and inspired contributions reflect their dedication to the IHS mission, and demonstrate the leadership abilities, exceptional professional skills, and creativity that I believe are characteristic of so many IHS employees. The men and women being recognized here today have done much to bring improved health and wellness to American Indians in the Albuquerque Area.

All of you who receive an award today serve as role models not only for other IHS and Indian health professionals, but also for the next generation of health care leaders who are watching you, and waiting to fill your shoes. You have created a clear path for them to follow and set high standards to which they can aspire, and in doing so have helped ensure a healthier, brighter future for all Indian people.

Last Friday in Rockville at the National Director's Awards Ceremony, I was very pleased to oversee the presentation of the annual IHS Luana Reyes Leadership Award. This award, which recognizes an IHS employee who has shown the potential to make a positive difference, is a very special tribute to our future. The trait of making a positive difference is something that we all must strive to emulate. When you look at the 50 year history of the IHS,

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim's oral remarks at the IHS Director's Awards Ceremony in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on April 28, 2006. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

it's obvious that there were many leaders making a positive difference throughout our vast service areas. They won the battle over infectious diseases and improved the lives of Native people in many other ways.

As the 50th anniversary year of the IHS, 2005 was a special time of celebration, acknowledgement, and reflection. A day-long IHS commemorative event last August at the National Museum of the American Indian provided a rare opportunity to review the progress and significant events during this half century period. I truly believe that an organization that knows and understands its history can prepare for its future with greater skill and results. Another significant outcome of our anniversary year was the publication of a new summary edition of the "Gold Book," which was first published in 1957 as a comprehensive report to Congress on the health status of American Indians and Alaska Natives. If you haven't read it, I urge you to do so. It is now available on the IHS website under the Fact Sheets section of the Public Affairs Page. These 50 years of accomplishments should inspire us to achieve even greater progress over the next half century in improving the health status of Indian people.

In 2006 we begin another half century of making a positive difference through the Indian Health Service. While we face the challenge of stretching limited resources while trying to meet expanding demands for health care, we must also follow a new vision for the future work of the IHS. During the National Combined Council annual conference earlier this year, I laid out a new challenge and charge to the IHS leadership.

Today I want to share this new vision for the IHS and how we consider and relate to our patients, their families, and their communities. It is now time to develop an IHS-wide system of holistic care for each and every patient. By this I mean that we must look carefully at each of our patients and how we can best improve their mental, physical, social, and spiritual health throughout your hospital, clinic, or center. We must take that extra moment to connect our patients and their needs to our full range of existing services and evaluations. We must help each patient in the fullest way and not treat them in individual "silos" of care. As a patient leaves your examining room, are you sure that they are connected to related and logical services within your facility or their community? Does the patient have family members being treated for similar health issues such as obesity or diabetes? Treating the whole patient and his or her family in the context of their Native community is far and away the most effective, efficient, and long-lasting prescription for treating chronic illness.

Essentially, we want to systemize this holistic view throughout the IHS and, of course, evaluate its effectiveness at each step along the way. I know that many of you are burdened by numerous challenging conditions, and may wonder about taking on any additional tasks, much less a new initiative. My response is twofold. First, in this era of declining federal resources and staggering rates of chronic disease, we have no option except to take action to achieve future wellness. Second, as a career IHS medical professional, I can truly say I know the realities you face and am extremely understanding of these difficulties. But, again, I must stress that we all must work immediately toward instituting our new approach. You must not feel frustrated or alone in this process. This will be a service-wide initiative and we will lend all the support and advice possible.

As you know, I already have established the Director's three initiatives of Health Promotion/Disease Prevention, Management of Chronic Disease, and Behavioral Health. These initiatives are linked together and have the potential to achieve positive improvements in the health of Indian people.

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim's oral remarks at the IHS Director's Awards Ceremony in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on April 28, 2006. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

Our Chronic Care Workgroup has identified five related key tasks to care for chronic diseases that I believe are the basis of holistic patient care. They are:

- New ways of working, new ways of thinking, and new designs for the delivery of care.
- Optimal use of technology.
- The empowerment and full engagement of individuals, families, and communities in health care.
- Utilization of all of our professional and lay health personnel resources in the most creative and effective ways.
- A focus on the risk factors and underlying causes of chronic illness.

Thanks to all of you for attending this ceremony. And my congratulations to today's award winners. Throughout my IHS career and my frequent travels to IHS and Tribal facilities, I have observed firsthand that the Indian Health Service has some of the most competent, dedicated, and hard-working employees in Federal Service. Please accept my sincere and deep thanks for all that you do for the good health of Native communities.

* * *