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2005

Bemidji Area Awards Ceremony

Red Lake Indian Health Service Hospital
Red Lake, Minnesota
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Opening Remarks

by

Dr. Charles W. Grim, D.D.S., M.H.S.A.
Assistant Surgeon General
Director, Indian Health Service

Welcome to the Indian Health Service Bemidji Area Awards ceremony. It is a pleasure to be here today to recognize and honor some of the most hard-working, innovative, and committed employees in the Indian health system. Each of you has helped to significantly improve the health and wellness of American Indians in the Bemidji Area, as well as serving as an inspiration and role model for all of us in Indian health.

This past year has been especially challenging for all staff in the Bemidji Area, as you were faced with dealing with the tragic event and aftermath of the Red Lake shootings. You have all shown great strength and resiliency in meeting and overcoming these challenges, and I think you are all deserving of special recognition for your efforts.

This event would not be possible without the hard work of the members of the Bemidji Area Awards Committee, and all those who assisted them. I know putting together an event such as this can get very complicated, and we appreciate their excellent job in making sure everything runs smoothly. Thank you.

The recipients of these awards have all given generously of their time and unique skills to help improve the health and lives of the Indian people living in the Bemidji Area. Their

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim's oral remarks at the Bemidji Area Awards Ceremony in on August 26, 2005. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

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 and tribal employees. The men and women being recognized here today have done much to earn our gratitude and respect, and we honor them for their contributions to furthering the IHS mission of raising the health of American Indian and Alaska Native people to the highest level possible.

This year's awards cover a wide range of accomplishments, reflecting the varied scope of programs, services, and functions that the Bemidji Area IHS provides on behalf of Indian people. These diverse accomplishment range from excellence in the general delivery, planning, and administration of health care services to exceptional and innovative performance in dealing with the crisis of the Red Lake shooting.

I know the demands of that tragic event and its aftermath threatened to overwhelm the capacities of the Bemidji Area staff and resources. But you have all done an incredible job of meeting and overcoming all challenges set before you. In doing so, you have earned the admiration and respect of all of us in the Indian health system and throughout Indian Country.

Those who are receiving an award here today, and all of you who daily demonstrate the highest level of professionalism and commitment in all you do, have a profound and far-reaching impact on Indian health. You serve as an inspiration and role model not only for other health care professionals, but also for the next generation of health care professionals and leaders who are watching you, and waiting to fill your shoes some day. 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.

I would like to take this opportunity to mention an important milestone in the history of the Indian Health Service, which most of you here are probably aware of already. In July of 1955, the Indian Health Service was officially transferred from the Bureau of Indian Affairs to the Public Health Service, making FY 2005 the 50th anniversary year for the Indian Health Service.

FY 2005 is a special year of celebrations and acknowledgements. A 50th Anniversary reference library of historical documents and photographs is being compiled. Also, we have published a special edition of the "Gold Book," which was first published in 1957 as a comprehensive report to Congress on the status of the health of American Indians and Alaska Natives around the time of the transfer. The new version highlights the progress made in the last 50 years, and our plans for facing the challenges of the next 50 years.

I hope all of you here will join us as we recognize this important date in the history of the Indian Health Service, and reflect on the 50 years of accomplishments by individuals such as all of you here today, who have helped us make great strides in the improvement of the health status of Indian people.

Over the years, you and your predecessors have overcome difficult obstacles to make great progress in improving Indian health, and I am confident you will continue that legacy. These awards are both a validation of what you have accomplished so far, as well as a demonstration of what you are capable of accomplishing in the future. With employees such as you to lead the way, the future of Indian health looks very bright indeed.

It has been my pleasure to join you here today in the recognition of these dedicated and deserving awardees. I have often said, and will say it again now, that the Indian Health Service has some of the most competent, committed, and hard-working employees in the Federal Government.

On behalf of the Indian Health Service, I thank you all for the outstanding work you have done and continue to do to improve the health and lives and future of American Indian and Alaska Native people. And thank you for the honor of asking me to be here with you to celebrate this special day.