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Otoe Missouria Tribe F. Browning Pipestem Wellness Center

May 14, 2004
Red Rock, Oklahoma

“A Dedication to Health and Wellness”

by

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

Assistant Surgeon General
Director, Indian Health Service

It is an honor to be here today to join Chairman Grant in dedicating this new Wellness Center to the memory of Francis Browning Pipestem, whose untimely passing was the result of diabetes related complications. This dedication is the result of his vision for the return of good health to the Otoe-Missouria Tribe and the surrounding community members, as well as the committed efforts of the many people who have served to make the dream of this facility a reality.

“Browning” Pipestem was a noted Indian attorney, judge and lecturer who was a committed and compassionate lifetime advocate for Indian people and issues. He served as an Adjunct Professor at Oklahoma University Law School, and he took great pride in his affiliation with the University. He was a zealous advocate on behalf of individual Indians and Tribes, and he made life better for all American Indians. He was a leader in his family, his church, his Tribe, and his community.

I can think of no greater honor to Mr. Pipestem’s memory than naming this facility after him and putting an emphasis on the treatment and prevention of diabetes. Diabetes is the fourth leading cause of death among American Indians and Alaska Natives. The majority of American Indians and Alaska Natives with diabetes have Type 2 diabetes, and the death rate is at least three times the rate for non-Hispanic Whites. In 2000, over 15 percent of the American Indians over age 20 served by the IHS were diagnosed with diabetes, which is more than twice the rate of non-Hispanic Whites of the same age range. The American Indian population is also more likely to develop diabetes related complications such as diabetic retinopathy, lower extremity amputations, periodontal disease and increased susceptibility to infections. Type 2 diabetes, formerly known as adult onset diabetes, is increasing among our youth and young adults at alarming rates. Between 1990 and 2001, the prevalence of diabetes among American Indian and Alaska Native adolescents between ages 15-19 increased 106%.

However, there is hope that we can reverse this trend and reduce or halt the incidence of diabetes. Recent evidence shows that diabetes, as well as many other leading causes of death, can be prevented with healthy eating and increased physical activity. We can make a difference by providing early prevention and intervention programs that promote healthy lifestyles and screening.

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim’s oral remarks at the Dedication of the Otoe-Missouria Wellness Center in Red Rock, Oklahoma, on May 14, 2004. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

This is why I have designated health promotion and disease prevention as a high priority for the Indian Health Service. One of my major initiatives for this year is to ensure that a health promotion disease prevention coordinator is available in each IHS Area Office. The H-P-D-P Coordinator will be available to provide technical assistance and training to Federal, Tribal, and Urban programs specifically in the areas of disease prevention that the Otoe Missouri Tribe has identified as a priority for your new Wellness Center. An H-P-D-P Coordinator will be recruited soon for the Oklahoma Area. A key resource currently available to you in the Oklahoma Area is Dr. Bernadine Tolbert, the Acting Area Chief Medical Officer and the Area Diabetes Consultant. She is very familiar with the goals and objectives of the Wellness Center and she just spoke to you here today at this historic dedication.

The central focus of the 5,000 square foot Wellness Center is to create a healthy community by improving the lives of Tribal members through innovative and effective community-based health promotion and chronic disease prevention and control programs. The Center will initially have a capacity to serve an estimated 300 patients with seven full-time staff, with additional capacity as other programs are developed.

The Pipestem wellness programs will include health screening clinics, community health representatives, public health and nutrition services, transportation services, and health education services that emphasize diabetes and obesity prevention. The new facility will also have a training and fitness room. The training room was also designed to serve as a “safe” room in the event of an emergency or disaster. The Wellness Center will assist anyone afflicted with the effects of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, or other diseases that have behavior and life-altering side effects where effective treatment includes lifestyle changes, including weight management.

This project has been a very high priority of the Otoe-Missouria Tribe from its inception. The initial planning was started under the leadership of the late Chairman Don Butler. The project continued through to completion under the leadership of Chairman James Grant. It was funded by a U.S. Housing and Urban Development Indian Community Development Block Grant for \$750,000, awarded in September 2002. Mr. Samuel Vetter, Executive Director for the Otoe Missouri Tribe, successfully submitted the HUD proposal for the grant and administered the grant throughout the construction phase.

I want to personally thank:

- Chairman James Grant for his leadership and strong support of this project from the groundbreaking through completion of construction;
- The late Chairman Don Butler for his leadership and support of this project at its inception;
- Samuel Vetter for his vision for this Center and his commitment to making it a reality, and his assistant Antoinette Hopper;
- Larry Finch Building Corporation and Thalden-Boyd Architects;
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and David Harader, Project Engineer, and the many excellent subcontractors who made this health center possible;
- Dale Keel, the Acting Oklahoma City Area Director, and his respective staff for their support of this outstanding facility we are dedicating today.

This impressive accomplishment is a reflection of the spirit of cooperation, partnership, and personal commitment of the many people gathered and acknowledged here today. We share the goal of advocating for our people, and striving to eliminate the disparity in health status between American Indian and Alaska Native people and the rest of the U.S. population.

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this historical occasion. This is a wonderful achievement, and I congratulate all of you for your hard work and dedication, and for the example that you set for American Indian and Alaska Native people across the nation.

Thank you.

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