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Indian Health Service Director's Award Ceremony

November 21, 2002

Welcoming Remarks

by

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During my 20 years with the Indian Health Service, I have constantly been impressed with the dedication of our employees in taking care of our patients and the day-to-day operations of the agency. I am very proud of our employees who overcome the routine daily work demands without losing sight of the overall goal of the Indian Health Service; providing the best health care services to American Indians and Alaska Natives nationwide.

I congratulate those of you being honored here today as recipients of the IHS Director's Award for 2002. You represent the "tip of the iceberg" of dedicated and innovative Indian Health Service employees. I recognize that awards are given for individual and team efforts – and I also know that the award represents a whole host of employees and support staff who make it possible for these achievements to take place. These awards given out today represent the many opportunities that the Indian Health Service provides for people to make a difference in the lives of our friends, families, and the people we serve.

As a direct result of the hard work, inspiration, and leadership efforts of those of you being recognized here today, the Indian Health Service has seen and will continue to see great strides in improving the health and welfare of American Indian and Alaska Native people. Your remarkable achievements include increases in the quantity and quality of healthcare services; efforts to combat the epidemic of diabetes through innovative fitness and wellness programs in the communities you serve; and a strengthening of the overall preventative health care program through the development of improved evaluation methods, focused goals, and effective strategies.

We are also recognizing the contributions to Indian health made possible by your exceptional organizational and management skills, which have enabled you to successfully meet the challenges of staffing shortages, funding limitations, and increasing patient care workloads. I am especially impressed with the improvements that you have made in the business areas of financial management, third-party collections, and in health data collection and analysis methods that will benefit Indian health programs for years to come. Your teamwork efforts in improving sanitation facilities, healthcare facilities, energy conservation, and JCAHO outcomes will also provide long-term benefits to the people we serve. And as we continue to look to the future of Indian health care, we applaud all of you who are involved in updating and improving our information technology, developing emergency response planning, and strengthening our management infrastructure.

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim's oral remarks at the IHS Director's Awards Ceremony in Rockville, Maryland, on Thursday, November 21, 2002. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

And we are also here today to recognize those of you who contributed to the strengthening of our Tribal and urban Indian health program collaborations and partnerships through policy consultations, successful contract negotiations, fostering of partnerships, advocating for self-determination and sovereignty, and promoting a climate of openness and mutual trust that is vital to the continued success of the Indian health care system.

We are able to plan for the future because of your contributions to the ongoing daily provision of high-quality patient care services, either directly or through innovative program design and development efforts. Programs such as diabetes prevention and treatment, elder care, pharmaceutical care, patient education, injury prevention, recruitment and retention of health professional staff, EMS response, and many more, have benefited from your hard work and tireless dedication. You are the backbone of the Indian health care system, and we could not continue to serve the health care needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives without your daily devotion to duty and unceasing dedication to improving the health and welfare of the people we proudly serve. Your efforts as leaders in the health care community will impact on the health and welfare of Indian people for many generations to come.

By honoring you, we are honoring all the thousands of IHS, tribal, and urban Indian health program employees who serve American Indian and Alaska Native people each and every day with unwavering dedication and to the best of their abilities.

As we move forward with our shared goal of expanding and implementing programs to improve the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native people, I thank you for your outstanding contributions to the Indian health system, which this award recognizes.

I commend you for what you have achieved and I encourage you to share your vision and new ideas with others and to involve, train, and coach others so that what you can continue to influence generations to come as well as the employees who will come after us to continue the work of this great agency.

Thank you.