



OS



ACF



AOA

CDC

CMS

FDA

HRSA



SAMHSA

Pawnee Indian Health Center Dedication Ceremony

March 27, 2004
Pawnee, Oklahoma

“A Dedication to the Future of Indian People”

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 dedicate this new health center to the service of almost 14,800 members of the Iowa, Kaw, Osage, Otoe-Missouria, Ponca, Sac and Fox, Tonkawa, and Pawnee Nations and other tribal members living in the Pawnee Service Area of the Indian Health Service.

Growing up in Oklahoma, my family and I received health services from the Indian Health Service. I set my sights on working for the Indian Health Service and helping Indian people as a result of those early experiences. And here I am today, having the privilege of standing before you and helping to dedicate this new health care center. Who would have thought! All of us have futures of unimagined promise.

This event today is being held to dedicate a replacement health facility that had its beginnings in 1929 with its construction and whose staff started providing services in 1931. The Pawnee-Ponca Hospital, as it was known, served the local Indian population – a population that had been reduced by disease, warfare, and reservation conditions to less than 1,000 people, from a population level estimated a century earlier at 12,000 people.

The 55-bed inpatient facility of that hospital was closed by Congressional action 50 years later, in 1981, when the hospital was deemed too old to be structurally sound or able to be upgraded. The Pawnee people received outpatient services here and sought in-patient services from community providers, and to receive many outpatient services that could not be provided from the Pawnee health center’s seven buildings.

It is now 73 years after the first health services were provided and this new health center will expand the number of outpatient services that can be provided locally to an estimated 20,000 primary care patient visits per year, and moves all of the services into one building – rather than out of 7 buildings – one of which houses the health center and is 103 years old! This new building doubles the space of all of the 7 previous buildings and the staff size will also double to provide the current and additional medical and support services that will now be available.

The construction of the Pawnee Indian Health Center begins a new era for the Oklahoma Area Indian Health Service. Under the leadership of George Howell, President of the Pawnee Nation, this will be the first replacement health facility constructed by a Tribe in Oklahoma and operated by the Federal Government.

The completion of this facility represents one of the successes of the HHS/IHS/Tribal partnership, and of the enduring spirit and strength of the American Indian and Alaska Native people.

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim’s oral remarks at the Dedication of the Pawnee Health Center in Pawnee, Oklahoma, on March 27, 2004. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

This wonderful new 68,890-square-foot facility will provide a full range of non-specialty services, including ambulatory care, community health, behavioral health, dental, physical therapy, public health nutrition and health education, and other associated support services.

For those attending the dedication today who served in the early days of the old structures, under what would now be considered 'historical' conditions, I am sure this new, large, modern facility fills them with great pride because it is a doorway for a better and brighter future that they helped build for our people. If you don't mind, I would like the former and current staff of the Pawnee Indian Health Center to stand so that we may show our appreciation for your hard work with a healthy round of applause.

This facility and the health care services the Center will provide have long been needed and anticipated by this community, and I am sure it will make a real difference in many lives by improving the health and well being of our people for years to come.

I want to personally thank:

- President Howell and Robert Chapman, the former Pawnee Nation President, for their strong support of this project, and the tribal leaders who spoke so eloquently for their strong support.
- Members of the Pawnee Nation Tribal Council and the Indian Health Service project officers whose vision for a new facility resulted in the funding authorization in 1995 and carried through the intervening 9 years.

- The Pawnee Transition Team and the Service Unit staff who have done a tremendous amount of planning to transition from the old buildings into this new hospital.

- Muriel Robedeaux, the project coordinator; the Johnson, Smitthipong & Rosamond Associates, the architects for the Center; Flintco Construction Solutions – West, the construction contractor; and the IHS Engineering Services – Dallas office and the IHS OCE staff, and the many excellent subcontractors, who made this health center possible.

- Of course, Dale Keel, the Oklahoma City Area Director, Jim Norris, the Pawnee Service Unit Director, and your respective staffs have our gratitude and thanks for this outstanding facility we are dedicating today.

This impressive accomplishment is a reflection of the spirit of cooperation, partnership, and mutual trust and respect that has been built between the Indian Health Service and the American Indian and Alaska Native people. We have come to the point where we stand side-by-side, heart-to-heart, in advocating for our people, and in 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 and asking 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 showing the way for American Indian and Alaska Native people across the nation.

Thank you.