



## Indian Health Service

March 7, 2004

### National Dental Assistants Recognition Week Statement

#### “Contributing to Good Health”

by

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This week, March 7-13, 2004, is National Dental Assistants Recognition Week, which was begun in 1976 by the American Dental Association and the American Dental Assistants Association. The week was established to acknowledge the skills and contributions of dental assistants.

For the Indian Health Service (IHS), this means giving much deserved recognition to the more than 1,000 IHS Dental Assistants, and the dental staff they support, for sustaining high-quality oral health promotion and disease prevention activities, both in the clinic and the community. The dental staff members of the IHS provide an average of more than 52,000 dental services weekly, or an incredible 3 million dental services annually. Clearly, there is a great need for dental services and dental hygiene awareness in Indian country.

Our thanks go out to all the dental assistants who work daily to help meet this need, and to improve the dental health of Indian people. The results of their efforts has brought double digit improvements in the percentage of children with no dental decay and reductions in the number of children with high decay rates, and a significant increase in the percentage of adults who have never lost a tooth due to gum disease or dental cavities.

The involvement of dental assistants in the development and implementation of over 30 continuing dental education programs for dental staff, their participation in oral health promotion/disease prevention activities that support the oral health objectives of the agency, their continued efforts to recruit and mentor new dental assistants, and their role as ambassadors between the oral health providers and local community members are worthy of our appreciation and praise.

The IHS dental assistants are recognized as professionals and their ability to help extend the range of dental services that can be provided and the number of people who can be treated is critical to making advances in eliminating dental health disparities. Particularly during this week I encourage anyone interested in beginning a career as a dental assistant to contact a member of the dental staff. The career opportunities for IHS Dental Assistants are many and varied – from entry level on-the-job training positions to expanded assistant positions following more formal training. There are many opportunities for current dental assistants to improve their skill level and for those interested in pursuing a career in dental assisting.

The contributions of the IHS Dental Assistants to oral health have helped to increase the quality of life for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Thank you.

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