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Indian Health Service National Director's Awards Ceremony

April 22, 2005

Welcoming 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 National Director's Awards ceremony. We are here today to honor those who have helped make significant strides in furthering our mission of raising the health status of American Indian and Alaska Native people to the highest possible level. I must say that I consider this to be one of my more pleasurable duties as Director of the Indian Health Service, to be able to participate in the recognition of these dedicated and deserving awardees.

This event would not be possible without the hard work of the members of the IHS Awards Committee - Regina Barnett, Vee Garcia, and Ann Church. And I believe Nick Provost worked extensively on this committee also, before he deserted us to go into a "working retirement." I would also like to thank all the Area Awards Coordinators, the Service Unit and Facility Coordinators, and all of you who nominated the awardees, for your valuable contributions. Special thanks go to Ed Conley, for his role in developing the National Director's Awards Web site. This site made it possible to submit, review, revise, rank, compile, and report award nominations online, as well as providing a host of other support activities. This is the first year we have collected nominations through a web site, and Mr. Conley has been a huge asset to this pilot process.

The text is the basis of Dr. Grim's oral remarks at the IHS Director's Awards Ceremony in Rockville, Maryland, on April 22, 2005. It should be used with the understanding that some material may have been added or omitted during presentation.

I would also like to recognize Theresa Harjo for her assistance with the Commissioned Corps Honor Awards, Mike Durkin for his beautiful design and graphic arts contributions, and all the others who “worked behind the scenes” to make this event possible—you know who you are! Thank you all. You have done a great job.

The recipients of this year’s 129 individual awards and 42 group awards have contributed in all these categories, and represent the high quality of professional staff that comprises the Indian Health Service. Their 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 employees. The 993 men and women being recognized here today have done much to bring improved health and wellness to American Indian and Alaska Native people.

This year’s awards cover a wide range of accomplishments and are indicative of the varied scope of programs, services, and functions that the IHS provides on behalf of Indian people. These varied accomplishments include:

- Providing outstanding leadership in clinical and managerial areas;
- Establishing and improving diabetes treatment and prevention programs;
- Providing outstanding service in the operation and maintenance of sanitation facilities;
- Improving customer satisfaction and protecting patient information;
- Implementing individual and community wellness programs to combat obesity and promote healthy lifestyle choices;
- Providing exceptional performance of clinical duties;
- Increasing access to services;
- Facilitating the implementation of Medicare regulations;
- Providing and improving emergency response activities;
- Developing and implementing innovative health delivery programs;
- Improving data collection and records management accountability;
- Establishing and improving substance abuse programs;
- Facilitating clinical, nursing, and emergency room skills training; and
- Negotiating contracts and compacts and promoting positive working relationships with Tribes and Tribal organizations.

And there are many more areas; certainly more that I have the time to list, where outstanding performance has been demonstrated.

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All of you who receive an award today serve as role models not only for other IHS and Indian health professionals, but also for the next generation of health care leaders who are watching you, and waiting to fill your shoes. 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, which will be available on the IHS website and on a special 50th Anniversary CD. A visual picture of our history will also be made available to each of you in the form of specially designed posters that depict the history and major accomplishments of the IHS. Also, we are also publishing a new 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 will show 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 those here today, who helped us make great strides in the improvement of the health status of Indian people.

Thank you all for attending this ceremony, whether to receive an award yourself or to honor those who are receiving an award. 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. I am grateful to all of you for the ongoing outstanding work you do on behalf of American Indian and Alaska Native people across the nation.

I have always felt that IHS has the most dedicated staff in the Federal government. The Indian health system employees have demonstrated time and again their devotion and determination in the face of both catastrophic disasters and the daily battles against health issues that our American Indian and Alaska Native communities face. Over the past month we have all witnessed the swift and skilled response to the overwhelming tragedy that occurred on the Red Lake reservation on March 21. Many employees in both Tribal and IHS health systems have demonstrated their skills to provide excellent care. I would like to take this

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opportunity to provide a special recognition to the Red Lake PHS Indian Hospital and Red Lake Comprehensive Health Services staff for their “*exemplary performance, professionalism, and compassion in the face of the tragedy that occurred in Red Lake, Minnesota.*” Their work was on the immediate front lines of this tragedy and I am extremely grateful to them for their outstanding work.

Again, our deepest appreciation goes to all those that worked together with compassion and strength to address this incident.

Thank you.

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