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# Indian Health Service National Director's Award Ceremony

November 6, 2003

## “Recognizing Remarkable Employees”

Welcoming Remarks

by

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

Assistant Surgeon General

Director, Indian Health Service

Welcome to the annual Indian Health Service National Director's Award ceremony. It is an honor to present these awards to those who have helped the agency rise to new levels of achievement. Levels that could not have been achieved without the support, advice, and partnership of our employees.

This event would not be possible without the hard work of the members of the IHS Awards Committee and the IHS National Director's Awards Committee, who are listed at the back of the Awards Book. The work they have done also will ensure that the IHS is well represented when nominations are considered for the Secretary's awards. I am personally aware of the hard work and effort that went into this year's award process – from the participation of the Area Awards Coordinators, the Chairs of the National Council of Service Unit Directors, National Council of Nurses, and the National Council of Clinical Directors, as well as several Headquarters staff and our contractor, Native American Management Services. I would like all of you to please stand so that we can thank you for making this ceremony a reality. You have done a fantastic job.

The recipients of the 92 individual awards and 24 group awards being presented today are an example of the caliber of employees of the Indian Health Service. You are changing the Agency. You see a need, and you fill it. You face a challenge, and you overcome it. You set a goal, and you meet it. You ensure that the Indian Health Service contributes to a healthier future for all American Indians and Alaska Natives. You have embraced the reality of challenge and worked to make it benefit our employees and our customers.

Your genuine dedication, commitment, and leadership are a demonstration of your professionalism, skill, and creativity. Without loyal, professional, and talented individuals an organization cannot become a great organization. We are fortunate to have an abundance of outstanding people working on behalf of – and for – the Indian Health Service. Individually and as members of teams, these 1,391 men and women being recognized today have contributed much to the quality of life and improved health of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Recipients this year have careers with the Indian Health Service that span less than a year to more than 50 years. The accomplishments range from:

- responding to the health needs of the community as a result of the Kimshba and Rodeo-Chedeski Fires
- establishing and improving diabetes, cardiovascular, and obesity treatment and prevention programs
- facilitating the construction of health facilities and safe water treatment projects
- building and strengthening the trust between Tribes and the Indian Health Service
- implementing cost saving programs such as fluoridation, point-of-sale pharmacy billing, supply inventory, health data and billing information, and developing an IHS-wide business plan
- reducing medical errors, increasing patient and employee safety, improving customer satisfaction, and protecting patient information
- implementing wellness programs for kids, young adults, adults, and elders
- improving data collection and reporting system expertise
- assisting in building tribal health and business capacity
- expanding tribal consultation efforts
- negotiating contracts and tribal compacts
- and demonstrating outstanding LEADERSHIP.

Twenty-one years ago, I began my career with the Indian Health Service. I had great expectations about the possibilities for helping to improve the health of Indian people, and I was excited to work with a team of professionals. Standing before you now, my expectations haven't changed and my excitement is just as great. It is because of the awesome and compassionate employees of this Agency there is great potential for making a positive difference for those we serve.

All of the people who receive an award today are role models not only for those of us whose fortune it is to know and work alongside them, but also for the next generation that is considering committing their time and energy to public service. It is through the excellent work of individuals and teams that the Indian Health Service gets its strength and ability to serve American Indian and Alaska Native people.

The Indian Health Service is also fortunate to have had some of the best government leaders serve in the role of Director of this Agency. Dr. Emery Johnson, our keynote speaker today and the fourth Director of the Indian Health Service, is one such leader. Through his contributions and leadership he helped develop and get passed historic legislation that has had an enormous impact on the health programs for Indian people – the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which we refer to as public law “638,” and the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, passed in 1976, which is the cornerstone of the legal authority to provide health services to American Indians and Alaska Natives. Without these legislative actions I do not believe the Indian Health Service would have received independent agency status or been able to broaden the scope of our health programs that we enjoy today. Since his retirement 22 years ago, he has continued advocating for Indian health programs and continues to be a friend, mentor, and advisor to the Indian Health Service.

I am pleased to see so many of you here today so that I can personally thank you for the work that you do for American Indian and Alaska Native people.