

To: All IHS

From: Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director

Date: 2/26/10

Subject: Update on Director's Priorities

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I am writing today to provide a new update on progress related to my priorities for our work as we change and improve the Indian Health Service (IHS). We are making significant progress in each priority area as follows:

**PRIORITY 1: To Renew and Strengthen our Partnership with Tribes**

We are working on two active Tribal consultations: 1) improving the consultation process; and 2) improving the Contract Health Services (CHS) program.

While Tribal leadership has stated that the IHS consultation policy is a good one, they have indicated that we could improve our process for consultation. In August, I issued a Dear Tribal Leader letter to formally request input on our consultation process. I then convened a workgroup of two Tribal elected officials from each IHS Area to review input and make recommendations. This workgroup met in December and January and we developed recommendations that were sent out to all Tribes for review on January 15, 2010. Comments are due on March 15, 2010. The Dear Tribal Leader letter with the workgroup recommendations is available on the IHS website.

The second active consultation is on how to improve the IHS Contract Health Services program, which pays for medical services and referrals to the private sector. A Dear Tribal Leader letter was sent on January 15, 2010 requesting input on how to improve the CHS program. In addition, Tribes were invited to a listening session and a best practices meeting in February. We are rescheduling these meetings due to their cancellation during the recent blizzard in the Washington, D.C. area. I also plan to convene a workgroup with two representatives from each IHS Area to review input on how to improve the CHS program and also to review the current formula for distribution of CHS program increases. While it is clear that we need more resources for the CHS program, we also must look at how we can improve the way we do business.

I am also visiting all 12 IHS Areas in the next 3-4 months to consult with Tribes on how we can better partner with them on the Area and local levels. I have already completed visits to the Tucson and Billings Areas.

## **PRIORITY 2: In the Context of National Health Insurance Reform, to Bring Reform to IHS**

Work continues on the top priorities of staff and Tribes to change and improve the IHS. The top Tribal priorities (more funding, improve CHS program, improve consultation) are being addressed through our budget formulation process and the consultations mentioned above. The FY 2011 President's budget proposal represents an almost 9 percent increase which is the largest percent increase of all the Department of Health and Human Services Operating Divisions (agencies). Despite the current budget freeze and goals for fiscal discipline and debt reduction, the IHS budget proposal represents President Obama's commitment to honor treaty obligations and Secretary Sebelius' priority to improve IHS.

We are making progress on the top staff priorities for Internal IHS reform and are improving the way we do business as follows:

- Human Resources – we are working on how to improve/streamline the IHS hiring process by transitioning to a more proactive and efficient hiring process. We are beginning work to develop some standard position descriptions that will allow for more efficient advertising of positions. We are also updating our performance management process and measures to better reflect the priorities and work of the agency and will be further clarifying expectations for managers and staff on successful performance management. We are working on some recommendations for improving recruitment and retention.
- UFMS – we are continuing training on UFMS and are developing more consistent, proactive and transparent budget management practices at headquarters and in the IHS Areas to help make our financial management process more effective and responsive to our needs. We continue to work with HHS on improvements in UFMS as well. Area Directors are developing more consistent budget management tools across IHS Areas.
- Management – we are conducting management reviews of IHS Areas to look at how we are doing business and how we can improve. We have met several times now with IHS Area Directors on how to improve the way we do business throughout the agency. As mentioned above, we are improving our performance management practices and will more directly measure performance of management and staff in the context of agency priorities. I have posted on the IHS website expectations for all staff on customer service, ethics and professionalism. We will do more to

reinforce these expectations. I encourage employees and supervisors to review these together and discuss how we can all improve in these areas.

### **PRIORITY 3: To improve the Quality of and Access to Care**

In announcing that customer service is a priority, we will expect all staff as a part of their job performance to treat both external customers (patients and Tribes) and internal customers (other staff) with outstanding customer service. We are developing ways to recognize those that provide excellent customer service, and will make those that do not provide good customer service accountable for their poor job performance.

We are also working on clarifying how our Improving Patient Care (IPC) initiative will contribute to helping us improve the quality of and access to care in IHS. I have been working with IPC leadership to better define the IPC initiative by clarifying the purpose, simplifying the language, examining the impact of this initiative so far, and developing a plan to develop internal IHS capacity to lead and conduct this initiative as we invite more sites to participate over the next three years. We are also working on developing a better evaluation framework for this initiative.

I am meeting with our clinical providers at the upcoming IHS National Combined Councils meeting and plan to listen to input from our providers on priorities for improve the quality of and access to care for our patients. I will be conducting a listening session in the plenary session on the first day of the meeting and then will meet individually with councils.

### **PRIORITY 4: To Make all of our Work Transparent, Accountable, Fair and Inclusive**

I continue to work to improve communication about IHS activities and our work on our priorities. In addition to all the presentations, interviews with media, other meetings, and communications with Tribes and employees, I have updated the IHS website to include a new Director's Corner that will include information such as presentations, Dear Tribal Leader letters, updates on internal IHS reform, other messages and my new "Director's Blog." I plan to use the Director's Blog to post brief updates on our activities and the latest IHS news at least weekly.

Overall, we are making progress on our priorities and are moving forward on the challenging work to change and improve the IHS. Over the next weeks to months our activities should become more visible in all IHS Areas. I know that some are anxious about change, and that others are anxious for progress. The changes we are working on are fundamental improvements in how we do business as an agency and I believe they will help address over the long term many of the priorities for change as expressed by staff and by Tribes. There is

strong support from our staff, Tribes and patients for change and improvement. I will continue to provide updates on our progress at least quarterly in this format, as well as through direct communication with staff and Tribes, and through postings on the Director's Blog. Thank you for all your efforts to help us change and improve the IHS.

Yvette Roubideaux, M.D., M.P.H.  
Director