

To: All IHS

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

Date: 3/6/10

Subject: Message from the Director – Customer Service Update

I am writing to continue our conversation about how to make customer service a priority in IHS. I have received very positive feedback on my original message on this subject. There is overwhelming agreement that we need to improve as an agency and great support for making customer service a critical part of our work. I continue to be disappointed by reports about some employees who continue to be rude and disrespectful to our patients, Tribes, and other staff. Today, I would like to let you know how we are going to do more to address this serious problem.

First, customer service will be an important part of everyone's performance evaluation. It actually is already in the performance management tools of the agency, but I believe it has not been adequately emphasized. Therefore, I am asking all managers to discuss with their employees how they are doing with customer service, both in how they treat our patients, other staff and Tribes, and to make recommendations for how they can improve if needed. If employees are asked to improve and do not demonstrate that they are improving, they should be held accountable. I believe that someone who is repeatedly rude to patients, Tribes, or other staff does not deserve a fully successful evaluation. Our patients, Tribes, and staff are upset that poor performing employees still get fully successful evaluations, and even some get bonuses. While it is important that managers give employees an opportunity to improve, if there is no willingness to improve or no demonstrated improvement despite clear direction from management, management will take action. It is only fair to our patients, Tribes, and the other staff who are performing well.

Second, I have begun to create a culture that will not tolerate poor customer service by indicating that it is a priority of the Director, and I have started publicly to encourage patients, staff, and Tribes to give our staff direct feedback on their performance on customer service. When an employee acts in a disrespectful manner to our patients and their co-workers, disciplinary action should be taken to assist the employee in correcting their behavior. Misconduct by an employee will no longer be tolerated. I have made my customer service message public on the IHS website, and I have encouraged patients and Tribal leaders to print the message and show it to staff who are rude to them and to let them know that

they understand that customer service is a priority of this agency and a part of everyone's job. I have already started including this priority in my press interviews and communications about what we are doing to improve the agency. I am serious about making sure that we are moving toward the goal of having every patient and Tribal leader feel that they have been provided the best customer service possible.

I would also like to point out that we have many staff working hard to provide excellent customer service and I would like make sure that their efforts do not go unnoticed. I am planning to establish Director's awards for customer service to formally recognize staff that excel with their customer service to our patients, Tribes, and other staff.

I believe the only way we can improve customer service is to make it absolutely clear that it is a priority, and to hold employees accountable for it in terms of their performance and in their actions that are visible to all of our customers. Again, I hope we can collectively create a culture in this organization where quality customer service is the norm, and poor customer service is not tolerated. Being kind, respectful, and helpful to our patients, other staff, and Tribes is expected. They deserve the best from us.

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