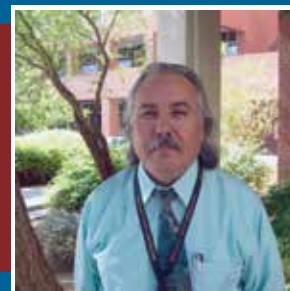
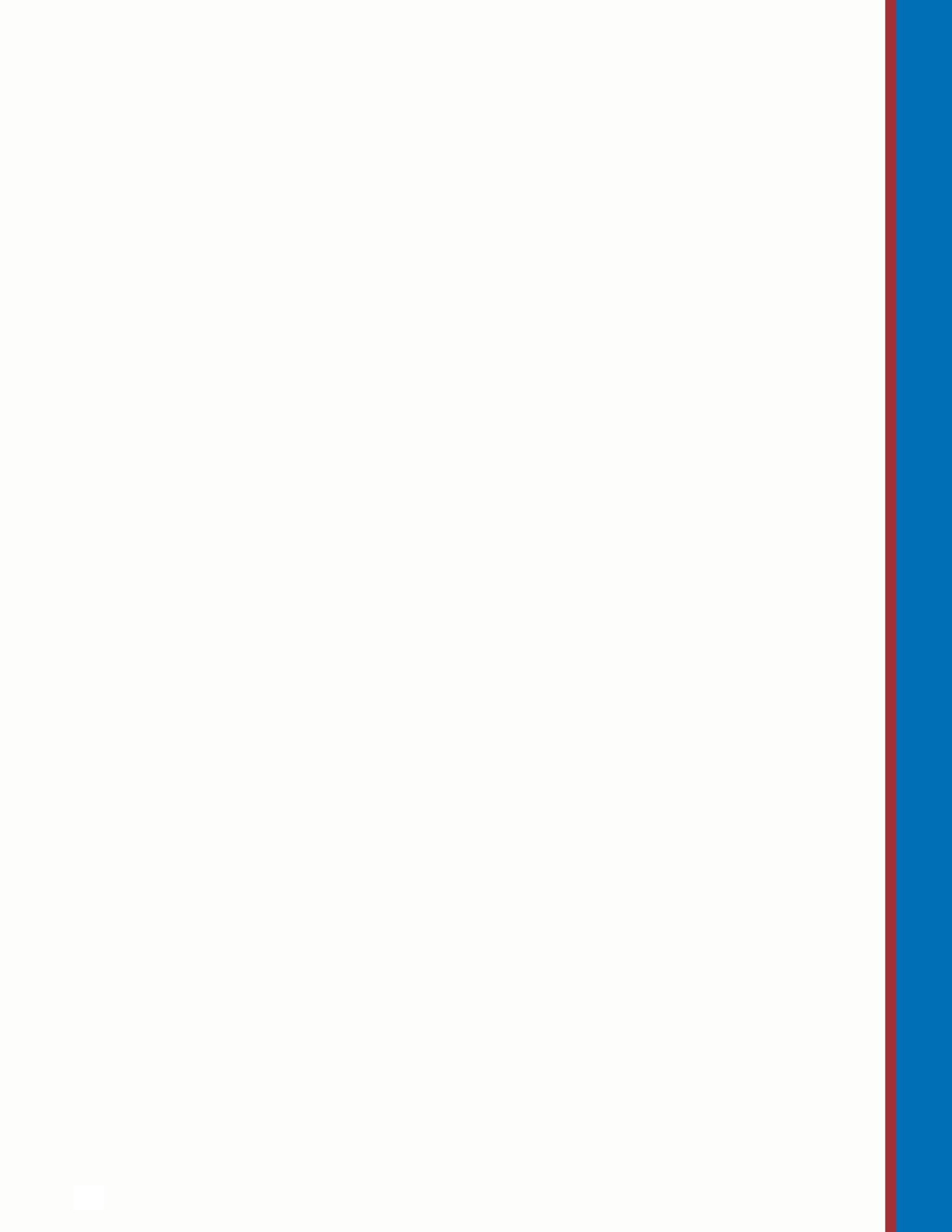


Stories of Success: American Indian and Alaska Native Health Professionals in Arizona

Volume 2
2009





Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the American Indian and Alaska Native students who are striving each and every day to achieve their dreams. From middle school to college, students continue to carry that dream of one day returning to their own communities as health professionals to help those in need, in spite of the many obstacles they may encounter along their way.

We also dedicate this booklet to all the health professionals featured in this book who have taken a moment from their busy lives and demanding careers to share their own personal stories of success. We are grateful for these wonderful stories which are dedicated to students following a similar path to show that success is possible.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the American Indian and Alaska Native health professionals for their participation in this project and contributing such wonderful and inspiring stories.

This project would not have been possible without our brilliant team of interviewers, writers, and editors. Thank you to: Charlene Wood MD, Thomasina Blackwater, Jared Fowler, Cazandra Zaragoza, Patricia Rodriguez, Mary Drago, Autumn Witt, and Athena Ganchorre. Thomasina deserves special recognition for her incredible patience in keeping this project going despite endless, frustrating delays. Her cheerful perseverance and belief that nothing was insurmountable has been the key to completing Volume II.

We thank The University of Arizona College of Medicine Office of Outreach and Multicultural Affairs for contributing the resources and recruitment of participants for this project.

We would like to extend our gratitude to Gale Marshall and Sarah Roman at Two Feathers Consulting for designing the format and layout for this booklet.

We would also like to thank the Indian Health Service for approving use of the INMED funding to develop and print this booklet.

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Foreword

This book is a collaborative effort of the University of Arizona/Inter Tribal Council of Arizona Indians Into Medicine (INMED) Program and the Office of Outreach and Multicultural Affairs in The University of Arizona College of Medicine. Since 2000, our partnership has enabled us to jointly sponsor activities for students to explore health career options, strengthen academic and leadership skills, develop competitive health professional school applications, and learn to network and seek support along their health career pathway.

AI/ANs are severely underrepresented in the health professional workforce. Many students have not seen or interacted with an AI/AN health professional before participating in our events. When individuals from similar backgrounds or tribes describe their work and life experiences, students begin to believe they can achieve their own dreams and goals. The purpose of this booklet is to provide inspiring stories about AI/AN health professionals in Arizona. We have included a variety of health professionals to illustrate a broad range of careers. We are grateful to all the AI/AN health professionals who contributed time and stories for this project.

This booklet builds upon an older, similar booklet, Native American Health Care Professionals in Arizona. That publication was jointly produced by the Arizona Graduate Program in Public Health, Native American Research and Training Center, and Outreach and Multicultural Affairs, which at that time was known as the Office of Minority Affairs. The W.K. Kellogg Foundation provided funding for that effort as part of a grant to Dr. Doug Taren. The booklet quickly went out of print with the multitude of requests from students and school personnel. Several years later, Indian Health Service support enabled the UA-Inter Tribal Council of Arizona INMED Program to produce Stories of Success. The enthusiastic response to our first call for AI/AN health professionals to participate resulted in this second volume. We are indebted to then-INMED director, Dr. Yvette Roubideaux, who is now director of the Indian Health Service, for her visionary support of the Stories of Success project.

We hope you enjoy the inspiring profiles. Please share this booklet with others. If you know AI/AN health professionals who are interested in participating in future projects like this or who are interested in mentoring and speaking to students, please contact us.

Carlos R. Gonzales, MD
Director, INMED Program
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Minnie Amos

Tribal Affiliation: Hopi

Current Position: Nurse Supervisor, Registered Nurse (RN), Pediatric Clinic, Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC), Phoenix, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)

Schools Attended: Arizona State University, 1992, BSN

Area of Focus/Specialty: Nursing

“Once you decide where your dedication and commitment lie, for example, to the Native patients and families, then you will have a really fulfilling and long-lasting career.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

When I think about why I chose my health professional career, I would have to say that my mother had a lot to do with my decision. My mother was an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse) who had a great influence on me while growing up. I think that is what led me into the health field. My decision to go into nursing came in a little bit later.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

When I was a senior in high school, I was fortunate enough to take a class called, “Health Careers Class.” During this class we went to the Indian Health Service (IHS) hospital and rotated through each department, starting with the dental clinic. We rotated through radiology and the labs, too. As students, we were able to gain a lot of hands-on experience in each department. By having this experience, I was exposed to the daily work environment of nurses. I really enjoyed my time during the nursing rotation and it was then that I decided that nursing was what I wanted to do.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

One obstacle I faced was financing my education. Financial difficulties could be an obstacle for any Native American who doesn't have the funding for college. I started out as an LPN right after high school. During this time, I was fortunate enough to find out about an IHS scholarship. Although I was employed as an LPN, I was eventually accepted into the IHS scholarship program and that's what enabled me to go to Arizona State University (ASU). While attending ASU, I earned my RN and my bachelor's degree in nursing.

What do you do in your current job?

In my current job, I'm the nurse manager for the pediatric clinic. I've been doing that about six years now.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

I would encourage students to look at careers with the Indian Health Service (IHS) because of the great benefits and the job security. My best advice is to be sure about your commitment to a healthcare career because you must have a long-term commitment and a real dedication to work with IHS. The IHS system can be a difficult system to work in, but it is also rewarding if you are dedicated and committed to working with Native American families. This is something I learned early in my career when I examined why I chose to work at IHS, versus working out in the private sector. Once you decide where your dedication and commitment lie, for example, to the Native patients and families, then you will have a really fulfilling and long-lasting career.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

The things I mention here are the same things that I would like to see for all tribes. My answer comes from knowing so many people from all the many different tribes that are represented here at PIMC. For one, I would like to see an improvement in the delivery of health care here at PIMC. These improvements would include the use of more modern technology and building a better facility. We need to improve healthcare delivery here at PIMC in order to take on the growing population of families. I see that in our pediatric clinic. We really do need a larger clinic and I hope to see that before I retire.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I don't practice traditional medicine myself, but I'm very aware of it. Whenever there is a ceremony at this facility, sage is burned. The burning of sage is a cleansing practice that is usually done upstairs when we feel like we've lost many patients. At times, traditional healers will come in and smudge the department. It's a good practice for all of the Native American employees here. It helps them feel better and has a healing affect on them as well. So, I certainly understand the importance of having traditional medicine available for our staff. I also strongly support the involvement of traditional medicine in patient care. In fact, this facility has a sweat lodge located behind the hospital that is available for patients as well as our AA groups. To answer the question, I would say I'm strongly supportive of traditional medicine overall and I think that patients should be able to incorporate traditional medicine with modern medicine.

Tamana (Bunny) Begay

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo, Seneca, Mohawk

Current Position: General Dentist, Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC), Phoenix, AZ.

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Dental Surgery (DDS)

Schools Attended: San Diego Mesa Community College, 1996; University of California, San Diego, 1999, Bachelor of Science (BS) in Biology; University of California, San Francisco, 2000, Post-Bach; University of the Pacific Dugoni School of Dentistry, 2003, DDS

Area of Focus/Specialty: General Dentistry

“Map out your academic plan and then take it one step at a time.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I was introduced to dentistry in high school while on a trip to Guatemala. I had the opportunity to travel with a medical and dental team from Oregon Health and Science University in Portland, Oregon. I always knew that I would work in an Indian community, I just wasn't too sure how. Working with the dental team, I gained experience and thought, "Wow, I can do this at home with the Indian Health Service". On a personal note, while in high school my focus was in the arts, particularly ceramics, so working with my hands was appealing.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

After I graduated from high school, I moved to San Diego, CA and attended San Diego Mesa Community College. During my years there, I participated in the work-study program and got a position in the Dental Assisting Program as a teacher's aide. While in San Diego, I volunteered at the urban Indian Health Clinic. Having these experiences helped to reaffirm my decision to pursue dentistry.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

My two biggest challenges were academics and finances. When I moved to San Diego I was financially on my own. I was an out of state resident so cost of tuition was still high even for a community college. Academically, I was behind in both math and science. In addition to being at the community college level and not having a strong academic background, I was not a good candidate for scholarships. With this starting point, I had to put in the extra work to catch up. Starting at a community college was the best place for me to do that. I took remedial courses that gave me a chance to build a solid foundation for my pre-dental coursework. I started getting good grades which was great for my GPA and my self-confidence. I also worked throughout college and fortunately I had good time management skills to handle the hours. However, I did not do much outside of work and school since these were my priorities. I used holidays and breaks as a time to pick up extra work hours since I couldn't afford trips to travel home.

What do you do in your current job?

I love my work as a general dentist, because I get the chance to do a little bit of everything. Each day the schedule is different. Some days I work in the emergency clinic doing tooth fillings or teeth extractions. Other days I get to do root canals, exams/check-ups, or work with kids. Since I work in a large urban facility, I do not get the chance to do as much prevention or education that I would do if I were in a community, and I miss that.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Get experience either by job shadowing or volunteering. If you are considering a job within the Indian Health Service, take the chance to go there specifically. Map out your academic plan, and then take it one step at a time. It took me three years to finish my math requirement for calculus because I had to start with elementary math. It may have taken me longer than most of my colleagues, but I had to be realistic of where I was academically and then plug away.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see us become healthier people by being more pro-active in our everyday decisions. We have got to embrace what is good in our communities and empower ourselves. It all starts from within each of us and within our homes.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

As a dentist I do not practice traditional Indian medicine. However, I am involved with the Phoenix Indian Medical Center's Traditional Cultural Advocacy Program. Our program helps to facilitate interactions between patients and providers of traditional Indian medicine and to educate our staff on issues of traditional Indian medicine, especially as it relates to western/conventional medicine.

Sylvia Laughter Bitsinnie

Tribal Affiliation: Dine (Navajo)

Current Position: Supervisor, Social Services Department, Parker Indian Health Center, Parker, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Master of Social Work (MSW)

Schools Attended: Southern Utah State College, 1982, Bachelor of Arts (BA) Sociology; University of Utah, 1984, MSW; University of New Mexico, 1996, Post-Graduate Social Work Fellowship Program

Area of Focus/Specialty: Mental Health, Medical Social Work

“Start early, find a mentor, and never give up!”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

During my first year in college while trying to figure out what I wanted to major in, I decided to go home one weekend and caught a ride with our hometown Community Health Representative (CHR). On the drive home, I asked her what type of healthcare profession she thought our community needed and she responded, “A social worker.” I thought to myself, “What in the world is a social worker and what do they do?” Out of curiosity, I went back to school and researched what a social worker did. I found that social workers can be administrators, planners, and policymakers, who develop and implement programs to address issues such as child abuse, homelessness, substance abuse, poverty, and violence. I thought, “Wow, I can make a difference in someone’s life and improve lives of others.” All I needed were some mentors like Marge and Dan Edwards from University of Utah who got me through the social work program, and I did it! Here I am today, making a difference in lives of those around me.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I had to do a certain amount of work at several places to complete my practicum. One place was the University of Utah Hospital inpatient units for orthopedics, surgery, oncology, and the psychiatric (open/closed) units. I also had the opportunity to complete two practicum placements for my undergraduate and graduate training in my hometown clinic, Kayenta Health Center, in the mental health and social services departments.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

Social work, while satisfying, can be challenging because you are dealing with a culturally diverse clientele and “at-risk” populations who are overcoming economic and social welfare challenges. But when all involved agencies act seamlessly to help a client or patient, barriers can be broken to help someone else succeed.

What do you do in your current job?

I am the new supervisor for the Social Services Department but not a stranger to supervising social workers. I have had excellent training from former supervisors, psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers to prepare me for this job.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

In a health care career, you have many choices of becoming whatever you want to be, but I would advise our people that we currently need Native American health professionals in our own healthcare facilities throughout the nation. I see we have more of our people joining the healthcare professions, but we need more entering the social work field. Start early, find a mentor, and hang in there but never give up!

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I hope to see more Native American people pursuing health care careers.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

Personally, I don't practice traditional medicine, but I do come from a family that practices traditional medicine as a career. I do have some knowledge and understanding of it since I grew up with it. I can say it's been helpful in knowing something about my culture and the practice of traditional medicine, because some of my Navajo patients/clients have benefited from using both traditional medicine and conventional medicine.

Barbara Chana

Tribal Affiliation: Tohono O’odham - Gila River Pima
Current Position: Substance Abuse Therapist, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Tucson, AZ

Health Professional License: Arizona State Board of Behavioral Health Licensed Substance Abuse Counselor

Schools Attended: Lamsan Business College, 1991, Business Management; Pima Community College, 1981, Social Service

Area of Focus/Specialty: Addiction

“I work with adults who are addicted to a number of different chemicals from medication to street drugs.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I didn’t choose my health profession. I “fell” into this career because of my own challenges with addiction.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I would have to say that my own personal experiences with addiction and my desire to get past those addictions are how I decided that this profession was right for me. Along the way, I realized that I had the gift of listening.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I faced many challenges along my path to this career. Some of the challenges I had involved taking on a mature outlook, deciding to return to school, and having a limited income. I was trying to raise my children at the same time on limited human resources and support while facing life barriers. However, I chose to overcome these challenges.

What do you do in your current job?

I’m a substance abuse therapist. I work with adults who are addicted to a number of different chemicals from medication to street drugs.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

You have to have compassion, not only for the people you’re working with, but for yourself. If you don’t have compassion for yourself or if you don’t understand who you are, it’s going to be difficult for you to deal with people. In this field, the people you’re going to be working with come in a variety of shapes, dispositions, and desires. These people have many different needs, as well as limitations in language and understanding. In short, the people I work with have all kinds of things coming at them.

What would you like to see for your tribe’s future?

I would like to see an increase in economic growth as well as more infrastructure. Another thing that I think needs to be addressed are the borders of our reservation, we need more security from drug trafficking and illegal immigration. Other than that, we also need a better way to deal with the alcohol-related issues.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I think to be practicing you have to be a medicine person so I don't practice traditional medicine, but I participate in it. How does it work with conventional medicine? I think that when you're working with Native people you need to keep in mind that there is more to healing than just conventional medicine. You will need someone who understands the language, can interpret, and who knows about the cultural and traditional beliefs. With relation to my work, I am good at bridging the gap between the two. I am a good interpreter of meaning and do adaptations to help them understand that both traditional and conventional medicine can work together. I'm really good at helping others understand what is important to a person's well being meaning, their emotional, mental and spiritual well being.

Carol Ann Colmenero

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Current Position: Native Ways Coordinator & Counselor II, The Haven, Tucson, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Social Work (BSW); Master of Social Work (MSW)

Schools Attended: Pima Community College, 2002; Arizona State University, 2004, BSW; Washington University in St. Louis, 2006, MSW

Area of Focus/Specialty: American Indian Women, Substance Abuse, Indian Policy, Historical Trauma

“The need for American Indian professionals in mental health is significant.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I wanted to decrease health disparities in Indian country to create healthier tribal communities and members.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I believe my own personal struggle as a Native women; growing up poor, seeing the health disparities first hand; and experiencing injustices throughout the system helped me decide that this profession was right for me.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

The misconceptions individuals have today about American Indian people have been one of my biggest barriers to success. Focusing on my traditional beliefs and practices has helped me to overcome this barrier.

What do you do in your current job?

As the Native Ways coordinator and counselor, I provide individual/group therapy to American Indian/Alaskan Native women with substance abuse problems and I also provide educational trainings to the community about working with this population. My other duties include conducting needs assessments, crisis interventions, psychosocial, treatment plans, and discharge resources for patients. I also facilitate domestic violence and human diversity classes to current clients at the Haven.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

The need for American Indian professionals in mental health is significant. The current health disparities are a result of years of trauma that Indian people have experienced. Investing in the field of mental and behavioral health will better impact the future of our Nations. It is in my work to plant ‘health seeds’ in our clients and teach them the tools they need to help them grow.

What would you like to see for your tribe’s future?

I would like to continue to minimize substance abuse and gang involvement among Native youth.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with

conventional medicine?

I have practiced traditional medicine since I was a child. Conventional medicine is common among today's society, but I believe it is a choice to utilize either conventional medicine, traditional medicine or even both. I believe both can be used together successfully, but our traditional medicine is what our spirits and bodies have embraced for generations.

Florinda Curley

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Health Professional Degree(s): Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies (MSPA)

Schools Attended: Grand Canyon University, 2002, Bachelor of Science (BS); A.T. Still University, 2009, (MSPA)

Area of Focus/Specialty: Family Medicine

“Network. Meet people in the medical field and develop relationships with these people.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose to enter the Physician Assistant (PA) field, after contemplating applying for medical school. I decided that medical school would be overbearing for my then 3 year old daughter. PA school, although extremely intense, is only a two year program. Other factors I found inviting were that: there is no residency upon graduation, there is flexibility in switching specialties, and you still have the opportunity to practice autonomously.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I had approximately two years of medical training in phlebotomy and as a laboratory technician, prior to applying to PA school. This allowed me to interact with a diverse group of patients. I also shadowed a couple of PAs, to learn more about the profession and experience the sense of duty. Spending quality time with my daughter and extended family was a challenge. I have a large family that is always having gatherings; early in my training I realized that I didn't have the freedom to attend everything, like I used to. Once I explained to my family the demands of my school, they chose to be supportive. I would manage to spend time with my daughter during the daytime, and then study after she went to bed or early in the morning. Basically, time management was one of the most important factors I had to fully incorporate. My first year of school was also probably one of the hardest years of my life because I encountered the tragic loss of my grandmother and my parents. The first year of PA school is the didactic phase, and is exceptionally draining. These trials made it much more difficult. Only by my faith in Jesus Christ and support from my family, I endured. My decision to commit to this profession was definitely challenged. I had to refocus on a whole different level and carry on. These experiences have made me more compassionate to my patients and their families.

What do you do in your current job?

I do not have a current job. I recently graduated from PA school and trying to decide where I want to practice.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Be sure to get plenty of experience in the health field(s) of interest to you. From my list of schools, most schools I inquired about applying to weighed heavily on the level of experience. This means that these schools were looking at whether or not I actually understood what a professional in my chosen field did on a day-to-day basis. Network. Meet people in the medical field and develop relationships with these people. They can serve as mentors in making wise decisions about your future career.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see more support from the tribe for PA students in this field. I was unable to obtain a clinical rotation site on the Navajo reservation.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

No, I am Christian.

Victoria Dawahoya

Tribal Affiliation: Akimel O'odham, Yaqui

Current Position: Operations Manager, Komatke Health Center, Gila River Health Care, Sacaton, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor Degree in Healthcare Business Management

Schools Attended: American Institute of Business and Technology, 2003, BBA

Area of Focus/Specialty: Healthcare Administration

"To overcome challenges I must retain my perspective when the going gets tough."

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I wanted to take the business organization and revamp the processes to make them patient driven and still apply business principles. I have systems administration and regulatory compliance experience and wanted to use these tools to merge clinical perspectives with business savvy.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I have experience in business avenues that include: business systems administrator, regulatory background, and clinical administrative assistant. My clinical avenue experience includes positions such as: lab technician, pharmacy technician, medical assistant, inpatient registration, and the clinical administrator of a mentor program.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

Academia is not simple. The academic portion involves a lot of hard work to get through, yet applying those principles I have learned is even more challenging. To overcome these challenges, I must retain my perspective when the going gets tough. I constantly remind myself to remember my tribe, my family, and the money that has been sacrificed for me.

What do you do in your current job?

I oversee the daily operations of our satellite health care centers for the Gila River Indian Community. My work is to ensure that all the clinics are fully functional, and that the native community is treated with dignity and respect.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

I would advise them to think with their heart and apply knowledge and common sense. Healthcare is a service industry, and although the population may not be educated in healthcare, they know "genuine" care.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see my people stop dying from diabetes. Although it is a prevalent disease and creates serious health concerns, it is a preventable disposition. IT CAN BE PREVENTED OR PROLONGED. Our future is to educate our tribal members about this disease. It is a war we can win. The strategic tactic is to know the disease and how it destroys vital body organs and how it can be counteracted with the implementation of prevention education, along with a uniformed approach in the treatment of diabetic patients by our providers.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I believe that traditional medicine is a way of life and spirituality that helps maintain our daily mental state of being. Conventional medicine treats a condition and is problem specific to one area of the body; whereas traditional medicine is all inclusive of the entire body, mind and spirit.

Pamela Daychild

Tribal Affiliation: Hualapai

Current Position: Pediatrician, Phoenix Indian Medical Center, Phoenix, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: University of Arizona, 1987, BS; University of North Dakota, 2002, MD; University of Hawaii, 2006, Pediatrics training program

Area of Focus/Specialty: Pediatrics

“Give yourself the opportunity to interact with people by volunteering.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I choose the area of pediatrics due to my interest in the health care needs of children. During my youth, I recall not seeing many Native Americans in the health field, especially as physicians.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

During high school, I was involved with my youth group at church which allowed me to work directly with the youth in my community. In college, I volunteered at the University Medical Center in the pediatric ward. The clinical rotations during medical school were also an excellent opportunity to experience each medical area, allowing me to choose one where I felt most comfortable.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I am the first person in my immediate family to choose a health career, and I probably did not make the right choices initially in my preparation for a rigorous course of study. I encountered difficulty with standardized tests and had to learn different methods of preparation for entrance and board examinations. The family support I received, and constantly being reminded of my goals, helped me to overcome many of these obstacles.

What do you do in your current job?

I currently work at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center in the pediatric department. I divide my time between the outpatient clinic and the newborn nursery. I see well and sick children, both of which require quick judgment in their care.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Take the opportunity to explore your area of interest and obtain information on the educational path for that career. Ask questions and learn as much as you can from those who are already in the health field. Give yourself the opportunity to interact with people by volunteering.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see more individuals from my tribe, the Hualapai tribe, to seek a career in the medical field. I am the first female physician from my tribe, and would like to see more follow the same path.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

None.

Lana Rae Fred

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo, Hopi

Current Position: Tobacco Assessment Specialist, Tucson Indian Center, Tucson, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Master of Public Health

Schools Attended: University of Arizona, 2003, BS; University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, 2009, MPH

Area of Focus/Specialty: Program planning, implementation and evaluation of disease prevention and health promotion programs.

“In public health, we try to seek strengths in our communities and foster those strengths so that people can feel empowered to make healthier choices.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose my career because I enjoy working with the community. I'm passionate about learning from the community, being creative about developing program events, and determining whether the program has made a difference in their lives. I enjoy every aspect of public health.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I was an intern at two different environments serving as a health educator. It was an enjoyable experience. I decided to take some classes within the MPH program to determine whether I wanted to pursue an MPH. I was a non-degree seeking student for two semesters before I decided to apply to the program. After beginning the program, I decided public health was the path for me.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I don't think this would be considered an obstacle or barrier, but it certainly was a challenge to complete my MPH while raising two children who were 6 and 11 years old when I started the MPH program. I had wanted more children at the time, but decided to hold off until after I received my degree. My plans took a turn for the best as my third child was born shortly before Thanksgiving break during the third semester of the program. I was determined to complete my final semester with my newborn in tow while working part-time at the Tucson Indian Center. It was by far the most difficult semester of my academic career. However, I completed my degree requirements and received my diploma. In my case, I overcame this challenge by constantly praying for strength, determination, and motivation. My family provided a great amount of support. My mother moved to Tucson from New Mexico to help provide care for the new baby and my sister also assisted in caring for my children. Another challenge was understanding the difference between being aggressive and assertive in all aspects of learning. This includes approaching your instructor and asking for assistance with writing in a less passive voice. As a Native American, I was taught to respect authority by listening, passive observation and limiting my questions. In this career path, I had to learn how to ask questions, ask for help, request explanations and write assertively. It was a constant balance because I felt like I would lose my native identity in this transition of learning. However, I learned it's possible to go back to your tribal communities and draw upon those same teachings once again.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I am conducting a needs assessment for the Tucson Indian Center's Tobacco Prevention Program. I'm also involved on other sub-committees that involve youth and employee empowerment.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Dream about what you want to do. Think about that dream often because you will begin to strategize on how you will be able to accomplish that dream. That dream will eventually become a realistic goal. Take little steps to reach that goal. Be patient with the process because it does take time, but before you know it you will have already accomplished your goal. Also know that any challenges, barriers, or obstacles can be overcome. We are resilient and creative people with a gift to improvise.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see my tribe heal from the generational and historical trauma and oppression that manifests into homelessness, substance use/abuse, obesity, and other chronic conditions. I would also like to see us draw upon our own traditional ceremonies and foods that bring us healing. Lastly, I would like to see those who left the reservation to obtain an education to return and serve their people.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

Traditional medicine has always been a part of my life. Traditional medicine allows me to take into consideration my physical, spiritual, emotional, and mental abilities when treating an illness. I believe herbs are a natural component of earth; a gift from the Creator. As a health professional, I do hesitate at times when I've been using both conventional medicine and traditional medicine because of the interaction it may cause. I use one or the other depending on the illness.

Maria Garcia

Tribal Affiliation: Pascua Yaqui

Current Position: Program Manager/Chiropractor, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Tucson, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Chiropractic (DC)

Schools Attended: Cleveland Chiropractic College, 1997, DC

Area of Focus/Specialty: Human Biology, Chiropractic

“I loved school and I loved to learn so that is what influenced me to continue my education and that is still what influences me today.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose this more as avocation so I believe it to be more of a calling for me to do this instead of me actually choosing to do this.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

Originally, I was interested in being an architect, but switched my interest to become a chiropractor. I believe this was avocation for several reasons. First, it was a drastic change in my life, which I didn't foresee being what I truly wanted to do. Second, I had been in prayer about what I was doing and my answer was not architecture. Third, I had affirmation from people who knew me and encouraged me into this field.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

One obstacle or barrier that I came across was the financial obligation. I was more worried about money so the ability to finance school was one of my biggest burdens. I was fortunate to receive a scholarship for my first semester, which helped greatly. I was also able to work. Other than my scholarship and work, I relied on prayer and faith to secure my finances. Another obstacle I experienced was when I was almost three-fourths of the way through my program. I started to think, “I am wrong. I am in the wrong field. What am I doing?” Luckily, I came to realize that it was a mental thing that I was going through. I was also homesick and I wanted to go home. However, I also realized on a deeper level that I needed to finish my program for myself and for the benefit of my tribe.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I am a program manager and chiropractor. My regular schedule consists of at least three days of the week devoted to patient care and two days devoted to managerial work, but that can always change. What I mean, is that I will squeeze patients in during my managerial work and place my management responsibilities on the back burner. That is, if there is nothing pertinent happening at the moment having to do with management, then that's where I accommodate more time for patient care. I participate in health education; for example, in the past I have helped with the preparation of a Blood Warning Pathogen class as well as assisting with CPR training, policy and procedure making, and advising committees.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

My advice would be to really look at what type of field they are interested in. I don't want to be biased in any way, but I think natural medicine is one of the best health careers out there. Personally, I think it has a lot to

do with the cultural beliefs and traditional beliefs that blend in so well with naturopathic or osteopathic medicine. I think this type of medicine comes more naturally to us when we study natural medicine. But if you're a scientist, then real (allopathic) medicine is the way to go. By that, I mean people interested in science who are always probing, thinking and wanting to find answers instead of believing that it just happens for a reason. My other advice is to always remember where you come from. It is important to not be so caught up in the mainstream ideas and philosophies of western society because they can deter us from what we are really here for. Everything else, such as finances and being away from home, is temporary. I think a lot of us get homesick and want to quit our educational journey, but I think it's important to keep in mind that time is always going to go faster than we think. My advice would be for students to not become impatient, but realize that you are just going to be there [in school] for a short period of time.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

On a general level, I would like to see all Native tribes recognize the good and admirable traits that each and every culture has. I think we've lost much of that because of the acculturation process. We have placed these things on the back burner, too. With that said, I think that the Native cultures could be blended together really well. I also think that this is what makes the Pascua Yaqui tribe, and other tribes with a similar background, so much stronger with more innovative communities. The Pascua Yaqui tribe is a good example of this process, because the very culture and traits that outsiders were trying to take away from us and suppress is still our stronghold. I would like to bring that strength back to people on an individual level, so that it can strengthen the community and make the tribe whole. I would like to empower the Yaqui people not just in the health spectrum, but also socially, spiritually, and emotionally.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I, by trait, probably do not practice traditional medicine. This question is a little difficult to ask because I think every community has a different definition of traditional medicine. I feel that what I do is similar to traditional medicine, even though it's classified as chiropractic. I think it is still part of my tradition and it blends in with it so well. The only difference is that different terms are used. Mainstream America calls my profession, chiropractic. However, in traditional medicine my profession is similar to "bone setters" and "massage therapy", but it is called "Sobador." Although both views and terms cover similar ground, I would not call my work traditional medicine. So it gets tricky for me when people say that. Personally, I do practice some traditional medicine. Do I blend it into my work? I do. Would I be able to do that outside in private practice, rather than here at the Pascua Yaqui clinic? I don't believe I could, because it's not under my license to practice that way. For the community, traditional medicine interacts very well with conventional medicine. This is mostly because the community is receptive to it. There is a primary care physician in the clinic that respects us for what we do and knows our limitations. This physician knows a little bit about what we do, and what we can't do, so he recognizes our ability to help people in that way. I used to oversee the alternative and traditional medicine program. In this program, I actually used to work with the traditional healers and learn from them. Although the program was somewhat fragmented, we worked really well as a team. Our traditional healer passed away, and since then we haven't been able to replace her. Our biggest concern is trying to figure out how to replace an individual like that. Traditional healers don't have the schooling that we have, so you can't hire somebody and expect a little job description to fit. There are a lot of dynamics that we have to consider in trying to replace someone like that.

Carlos Gonzales

Tribal Affiliation: Pascua Yaqui

Current Position: Associate Professor, Director of Indians into Medicine (INMED) Program, Director for Curriculum and Community Based Education, Advisor for Traditional Indian and Western Medicine Collaboration; University of Arizona College of Medicine, Department of Family & Community Medicine, Tucson, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: Carleton College, 1977, BA; University of Arizona College of Medicine, 1981, MD

Area of Focus/Specialty: Family Medicine, Rural Medicine, Cross Cultural Medicine, Traditional Indian Medicine.

“Family Medicine contains the widest breadth of medical knowledge that a physician can share with people.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose family medicine because I like the variety of patients I am able to help. You get to help patients from infancy to old age and you also get to know your patients. If you prefer, you can approach your patients in a holistic manner. You're not limited to just technology or certain procedures. Family medicine contains the widest breadth of medical knowledge that a physician can share with people. I like to know a little bit about everything, and if you have that sort of mindset, then family medicine is probably the best practice out there. On the other hand, if you want to know everything there is to know about one part of the body, then you need to focus and become a specialist of some type.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I had to seek experiences in every field of medicine before I chose family medicine. I had to decide: Do I really want to focus solely on children, which is what a pediatrician does? Or do I only want to focus on women's health care alone, like an OB/Gyn doctor? Or do I want to do only surgery? Is it just adults that I want to take care of, like an internal medicine doctor? Towards the end of medical school, I started thinking about working in family medicine and later on I was convinced that family medicine is what I wanted to do. Plus, in my day, only the rebels went into family medicine. If you were sort of a rebel and wanted to do something different and unique, then you went to family medicine.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

The biggest obstacle was, of course, getting into medical school. But once you get into medical school, if you can do well you are most likely to succeed along the way. So the obstacles back in my day were pretty obvious. There was a lot of racism. At the time, you just had to ignore it and have the self-confidence in your own abilities to know that you can do whatever you set your mind to do. I had to carry a lot of self-confidence almost to the point of seeming arrogant at times. In my day, a lot of people said that, “Indians and Mexicans couldn't make it [through medical school].” They believed we didn't have the educational background and the educational stamina to succeed. To overcome those assumptions, I had to be very stubborn and bull-headed, knowing my own abilities, and not letting anybody tell me any other way. Many times I had to just plow through the barrier, not going over it but instead just busting it down.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I do three things. One thing I do is teach medical residents. My main job is to teach residents how to be family doctors. Part of my duties include guiding a medical resident as they come up with a plan that

includes a treatment strategy for each patient. In addition to this, I'm a hospital ward attending which means that in the hospital, I supervise the care of patients on the family medicine resident team. I'm also the medical director of the clinic, so I make sure the clinic is running well, and if there are any complaints, any problems, or any issues, then it's my job to answer them. I also make sure the clinic is properly staffed. The third job I do is teach medical students in case based learning (CBL) during the first two years of medical school. Once again it's a variety and this variety is what keeps me happy.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

You have to be certain that the career you have chosen is what you want. Once you are sure that career is what you want to do, and then do whatever is necessary for you to succeed. This means that if you're going into medical school, you must be able to complete all the prerequisites. You also have to be confident in yourself so that you are sure in your own abilities to succeed. Don't let anybody tell you that you can't do it. Along with self-confidence, you also need to have the ability to do the hard work. Medicine is not about being a genius. It's about a person's willingness to be intellectually smart, but more importantly, being able and willing to put in the time to work and the time to study. That's what medicine is about. It's very time consuming and you need to be willing to commit the time to succeed. This time commitment doesn't mean that you give up your life, but it does mean that you must modify it a bit. The journey you take to reach your goal has got to be steadfast. You must remain focused on your goal but don't go crazy and become a hermit, because you'll have a miserable life. You must have a balanced life.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see more of the kids succeed, go on and have a desire to go into higher education. Probably the biggest problem we have is that so many kids drop out or are pushed out of high school and then they never finish their general educational studies. It's sad. I would like to see more of them go into higher education like I said, and then come back and help to improve the next generation, so you get a rolling effect. You go out, you get educated, you come back, you educate the next generation, they go out, they get educated, and they come back and they educate. Keep doing that circle a couple of hundred times, then we will be doing well.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I practice the philosophy of traditional medicine. Although I'm not a medicine man, I know and understand the philosophy of approaching people and the holistic thinking surrounding illness. I practice that type of philosophy and I approach patients in a holistic manner. I ask questions such as: How are you doing mentally? How are you doing spiritually? In addition to how are you doing physically? The physical aspect is what I'm trained to oversee as a physician. I cannot see myself acting like a medicine man, especially when I've never been trained as one. But as a doctor, I have worked closely with several medicine men. Since I am familiar with their philosophy of healing, I can use their philosophy to help me improve what I do. I do practice one aspect of traditional medicine in that I'm a sweat lodge keeper. My job is to keep the lodge clean, keep the area clean, make sure there is enough wood, make sure there are blankets, and arrange for the ceremony when appropriate. Inside the lodge, I'm the medicine man's assistant. I help maintain the ceremony, which not only helps other people, but also helps me to stay centered and keep my own orientation. When I go in there and help, I receive a cleansing. So, it has a secondary benefit of cleansing my body, purifying my spirit, and also helping me become balanced and harmonious again. So, I do participate in sweat lodges regularly. I help people to find a medicine man if they want to see one. I will help patients by taking the patient to see a medicine man and teaching the patient how to approach a medicine man. Thereafter, I help arrange for the ceremony at home.

Dwayne L. Gorman

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Current Position: Pediatrician, El Rio Community Health Center, Tucson, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: Northern Arizona University, BS; University of Arizona College of Medicine, MD

Area of Focus/Specialty: Pediatrics

“It is possible to leave the reservation, get an education, and still have the means of returning to the reservation and providing for the tribe.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Growing up, I had always known that I wanted to do something in the healthcare field. My mother worked in the laboratory for Indian Health Service (IHS) at a clinic in Kayenta, AZ, which was the half way point between school and home. So after school, I would stop by to see her and sometimes hang out in the emergency room. I watched the doctors and followed them around. At that time, I didn't know I wanted to be a doctor. I just kind of knew I wanted to do something within the clinic like my mom. It wasn't until by my second year in college that I became interested in medicine. During that year, I had taken time off from college and I was trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life. When I went back home to visit my mom for Christmas, I hurt my back and I went to the IHS Hospital in Whiteriver, AZ where my mother was living at that time. There I met Dr. Provincio, he addressed my medical problem in about ten to fifteen minutes and then we spent another hour and a half talking about medical school and the field of medicine. The first time I saw him, my mom was with me in the waiting room. She pointed over to the nurse's station and said, "there's your doctor." There were two men standing there at the nurse's station. One of the men was Anglo and was wearing penny loafers, khakis with the sharp cresses, and an Oxford shirt. The other man next to him was Hispanic and had on motorcycle boots, faded greasy jeans, black t-shirt with no sleeves, tattoos up his arms, with a big Fu-Manchu biker mustache, and big long black curly hair. So of course, I pointed to the Anglo, and asked, "that one?" My mom said, "No, he's the nurse, the other one is your doctor." He ended up just being a really fascinating and amazing guy. I think it was at that point when I realized that never in my whole life had I ever seen a minority physician. That's when I realized it was possible to be a physician. When I returned to Flagstaff, I changed my major to microbiology and started the pre-med process. Prior to college graduation, I applied to medical school, was accepted, and ultimately decided to pursue pediatrics as my specialty. I have always loved children and being around children. I decided that alleviating pain and suffering in children was what I wanted to do with the rest of my life.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

Growing up it was always a priority in our family to help other people. It seemed already incorporated in my family's way of life to help people and the medical profession went well with this philosophy. My mother was employed by IHS, we lived in IHS housing, our neighbors and friends were all in the medical field. What better way to help people than in the field of medicine.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

My first encounter with real big obstacles didn't occur until I started medical school. Fortunately, college was always straightforward for me. Applying myself and working hard yielded good grades. When I got to medical school, we had to learn such a large volume of information, and the way that I had studied before was

appropriate at the college level, but in medical school it wasn't adequate. I didn't do well my first year, but luckily here at the University Of Arizona College Of Medicine there was a learning skill specialist, Dr. Jill Keller, who helped me re-learn how to study. So it took a lot of encouragement and I kind of went kicking and screaming down this new path of how to study, but in the end I switched over to Dr. Keller's study methods and ended up doing better. I still have problems with standardized tests but I think it's something a lot of minority students encounter. A mentor of mine was talking about how his kids are already being taught in school how to read questions, answer questions, and how to manage their time during a test. The schools are teaching these kids how to take a standardized test. He said he never got that growing up and neither did I. For this reason, I feel like we're already a few steps back before the start of the race.

What do you do in your current job?

I just completed my pediatric residency training and was recruited and hired by El Rio Community Health Center, here in Tucson. I'm specializing in pediatrics which is the medical care of children. The age range is usually from birth to at least twenty-two years. The training program that I am in focuses on all aspects of pediatric medicine. I've taken care of premature babies starting at twenty-seven weeks of gestation in the neonatal intensive care unit. This means that they are at least a month or two premature. Inpatient medicine is the time I spent taking care of children in the hospital with all types of illnesses ranging from a severe viral infection to a diagnosis of cancer. My time on outpatient medicine was spent in clinics doing well child visits, physicals, ear infections and so on. There are a wide variety of electives you can choose from when you are training to become a pediatrician. In my training program, I've already completed cardiology, pulmonology, genetics, endocrinology, and pharmacology.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

I would encourage students to get a better idea of the time and commitment they will be undertaking by observing someone in the field of their interest. Follow this person around and see exactly what their daily life entails. I've had a couple of friends in medical school who didn't really appreciate what medical school involved. They didn't realize how demanding it was or what being a doctor meant. Ultimately, they left medical school and chose other career paths.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

The Navajo Nation is very committed to funding scholarships for students who wish to attend a university or college, but it seems like there is never enough money. The only money that I received from my tribe was during college, and that was just enough to buy my text books and not much else to live on. So I ended up having to take out loans during college. For medical school, I was still unable to receive tribal funding, so that left me taking out additional loans. I think the most daunting thing about starting school was the cost and I have a considerable amount of debt because of college and medical school. Although the IHS scholarship is a great financial resource, I would like to see the Navajo Nation be able to put more money into education.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I do rely on traditional medicine when I'm out of balance, but I don't provide traditional medicine to patients. There's been an increase in awareness of hospitals and their administrations for the need of the involvement of Native healers. I know the Veteran's Administration has medicine men on staff at certain hospitals. Some programs such as the Native American Cardiology department at University Medical Center in Tucson tries to help the Native patient as a whole person. They provide traditional food, interpreters who are able to explain complex medical situations into topics that elders can understand, they also have access to traditional healers.

Edward S. Grijalva

Tribal Affiliation: Tohono O’odham, Yaqui

Current Position: Coordinator of Special Populations & Tribal Liaison, Four Winds Turning Point Program, Compass Behavioral Health Care, Tucson, AZ

Health Professional License/Certificate: Licensed by the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners, Licensed Independent Substance Abuse Counselor (LISAC), Certified Recovery Support Specialist (CRSS)

Schools Attended: Pima Community College, University of Arizona

Area of Focus/Specialty: Drug and Alcohol Treatment for Native Americans, Mental Health, Detoxification Services

“I work 24/7 in my field because we lack qualified tribal members and necessary resources to help those in need.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Based on personal experiences and struggles of our people, this became a calling for me to give back to my community and to use the skills and talents that I was given to assist others in achieving success.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I have been in this profession for over twenty-seven years. Daily, I see the hope of success in the faces of those who come through our treatment program. There have been bitter and sweet moments, but I know in my spirit this is the right path for me.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I struggled with my own addiction for many years after my discharge from the military and the Vietnam War. In overcoming my addiction, I had tremendous support and love from my family even when I had failed.

What do you do in your current job?

I am the Tribal Liaison for Compass Behavioral Healthcare. I work 24/7 in my field because we lack qualified tribal members and necessary resources to help those in need.

I helped create and implement a co-ed Native American Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program called Four Winds Turning Point. I oversee the cultural services for all our clients. I have been on T.V., radio, print media, in addition to speaking at conferences and to the community about education, prevention and treatment.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Whatever you are going to do, do it to the best of your ability! Choose your career wisely. Financial gain is not always going to bring satisfaction.

What would you like to see for your tribe’s future?

I would like to see our tribes aggressively confront major chronic health issues such as obesity, diabetes, and chemical dependency. I would also like to see the restoration of families and healing from generational trauma.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

We use a combination of traditional and conventional medicine in our treatment program. During the detoxification process we use medical interventions, but we also offer our clients traditional medicine such as smudging, traditional prayer or contemporary prayer.

Carletta J. Joshevama

Tribal Affiliation: Hopi

Current Position: Supervisory Clinical Nurse, Emergency Department, Hopi Health Care Center, Polacca, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN)

Schools Attended: Northern Arizona University, 2001, BSN

Area of Focus/Specialty: Nursing

“Find a mentor who can support and guide you in finding a career choice.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose this line of work because I felt a great need to help people. I am a people person and it just felt right for me to be a nurse. I also worked as a nursing assistant in the early 1980's. I tried other areas but I was always drawn back to nursing. Nursing is a challenging field but I enjoy it. The duties often vary and there is always something different each day.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

There were many obstacles that I encountered early on in my education. I had to quit my full-time job to pursue a career in nursing. Making this change in my career was a difficult decision because my previous job had helped support my family financially. I was also an older student and struggled with the idea that I should have already settled down with a career by now. During my first semester in school, I also lost my father who was my biggest support.

What do you do in your current job?

I supervise the nursing staff in the Emergency Room (ER) to ensure that there is proper coverage and implement changes to improve the call and flow in the ER. I also make sure the nursing staff is competent in knowledge and skill. If they need improvement, I work with getting them up to par. I also help keep our policies up to date and staff morale upbeat.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Take the time to volunteer in the areas you are interested in. Also, find a mentor who can support and guide you in finding a career choice. In addition, look at different schools and find one that will fit your needs and don't be afraid to ask questions.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see a full fledged hospital with an Intensive Care Unit (ICU), a surgery department, and a birthing center that can handle high-risk Obstetric (OB) patients. I would also like to see more Native Americans in the health professions serving their own communities and taking pride in the quality of care provided.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

No, but I respect it and factor this in with Western Medicine. I educate the non-native staff in ways they can understand and assist patients in incorporating traditional medicine into patient care, if requested.

Lynnae Lawrence

Tribal Affiliation: Hopi, Assiniboine

Current Position: Chief Executive Officer, Colorado River Indian Health Service Unit, Parker Indian Health Center, Parker, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: University of Arizona College of Medicine, 1998, MD

Area of Focus/Specialty: Internal Medicine

“Although it may sound like a cliché, it is important to always remember who you are and where you come from.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

My first love was in the artistic realm, the design and construction of traditional and contemporary Native American dress. I received my Bachelor’s Degree in Fashion Merchandising from ASU and started a contemporary line of Native American clothing designs. During that time, my family was growing and I took a job at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center as a medical clerk to supplement my income. That was when I discovered my interest in medicine.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

In my research of medicine as a possible career choice, I found out that some of the curriculum requirements for medical school involved quite a bit of science courses. I decided I would go into nursing instead and was amazed to find out that I loved and really looked forward to attending and doing the science work required in those courses. I also found that I really did want to be a medical doctor and not a nurse. Fortunately, I did well in those science courses and was able to meet some Native American doctors along the way who mentored me onward towards medical school.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I was considered a “non-traditional” student by western society standards, meaning that I was an older student with children. I had two daughters who were finishing up elementary school and one daughter on the way. I had heard that although I could not be discriminated against for medical school consideration because of my pregnancy, it did occur. I took great pains to conceal my pregnancy during interviews and in fact was offered a spot at one particular medical school that later voiced its “grave concern” that I would not be able to be successful given my pregnancy. I determined it was in the stars for me to attend the University of Arizona and made my peace to do just that. My daughter was born the week prior to matriculation and the University of Arizona was more than supportive in helping me be successful given my family status. My own mother was very instrumental in helping me achieve my goal as she lived with us and helped care for the children.

What do you do in your current job?

I am the CEO for the Colorado River Service Unit located at the Parker Indian Health Center. My primary job is administrative. I am continually working to assure that appropriate health care services are provided to the Colorado River, Hualapai and Havasupai tribes.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Keep your nose to the grindstone and don't let anyone tell you that you can't do it when you know in your heart that you can. Be persistent and don't be afraid to ask questions. Although it may sound like a cliché, it is important to always remember who you are and where you come from. This journey can be hard and challenging and may lead you to question your decisions. Knowing your traditions and core values can lead you through these difficult times. More than anything, remember that your people need you so get that education and bring it back to serve them.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see a stable tribal government that returns to supporting and uniting the Hopi people in order to retain our culture and religious ceremonies according to traditional Hopi teachings. One day I hope to see Hopis at all levels of education, traditional and western, working side by side to guide the Hopi Senom into the future.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I do seek help from traditional healers on occasion and have found their practices very helpful. I do not believe that western medicine has all the answers when it comes to healing the entire person, mind, body and spirit. I believe that traditional medicine and western medicine are complementary.

Erica Michelle Lindsey

Tribal Affiliation: Cherokee

Current Position: Resident Physician, St. Joseph's Hospital, Phoenix, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Master of Public Health (MPH), Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: University of Arizona, 2002, BS; University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health, 2004, MPH; University of Arizona College of Medicine, 2009, MD

Area of Focus/Specialty: Family Medicine

"Though my road may have been a little longer and bumpier than some, I never stopped moving forward."

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I wanted to be a doctor since I was a small child and I have wanted to improve health care services for Native American people since high school.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I volunteered for many years with the Native American Cardiology program before entering medical school. In medical school, I participated in the Commitment to Underserved People (CUP) program and gained lots of experience in pediatrics and women's health. I strived to do my best on each of my clinical rotations because I was not sure what my field of medicine would be. When I got to my last rotation of the year, family medicine, I fell in love with the field and decided it was what I wanted to do with my life.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I experienced many challenges on the road to becoming a doctor, but I knew all along that this is what I was meant to do and though my road may have been a little longer and bumpier than some, I never stopped moving forward.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a first-year resident in family medicine, so I do a little bit of everything, from internal medicine, obstetrics, pediatrics, surgery, to whatever my senior resident tells me to do.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Be true to yourself and your dreams. Realize you have to work very hard and sacrifice, but in the end you will have the best job ever!

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see more preventable diseases be prevented.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I do practice traditional medicine. I think traditional medicine and conventional medicine can help each other be more effective in helping the whole person be healthy.

Elizabeth A. Lopez

Tribal Affiliation: Tohono O'odham

Current Position: Registered Nurse (RN), San Simon Health Center, Tucson Area Indian Health Services

Health Professional Degree(s): Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN)

Schools Attended: Pima Community College, 1992, ADN

Area of Focus/Specialty: Nursing

"I believe that if you truly commit yourself to accomplish a goal, you will reach it!"

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I always knew that I wanted to be in healthcare, but I thought I wanted to be a pharmacist. I applied to the nursing program on a dare because one of my chemistry classmates had applied for admissions and she told me that it was a difficult program to get accepted into. I was taking a biology course that I was having problems with and thought that if I was accepted into the nursing program I could drop the class because it was no longer necessary—boy, was I wrong. I was accepted into the program and had to take not just one biology course, but several!

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

My mother is a retired nurse and my stepfather was an ambulance driver so I have always been surrounded by medicine. When I was in nursing school, I was awarded a scholarship from Indian Health Services (IHS) and was given the opportunity to put the knowledge and skills that I had gained to use under the supervision of IHS nurses. Those nurses showed me what it meant to truly be a nurse for our people and I will never forget that experience and that is one of the reasons that I am still here serving my people.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I was very fortunate that I did not have to deal with many of the barriers that others have. My very first semester in college, my funding did not come through, but I had saved money and my family was very supportive and helped me continue my education. At the end of the semester, tribal funds were made available to me and then I was truly blessed to have been awarded the IHS scholarship for the remaining time I was in school.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a clinical nurse with the Tucson Area Indian Health Service.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Don't give up when the going gets tough. In the end, all of your hard work and struggles will pale in comparison to the rewards that you will reap from doing what you love.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like our younger generation to realize that there is a healthy, bright future ahead of them and for them to look forward and not focus on the things that have happened in their past.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I do believe in the power of traditional medicine. Traditional medicine is a sacred gift that has been passed from our ancestors and it can complement many of the teachings of western medicine. I believe that if healthcare providers only treat the symptoms of an illness without treating the whole individual, complete healing cannot occur.

Linda B. Markle

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Current Position: Deputy Chief, Winslow Indian Health Care Center, Indian Health Service, Commission Corps Officer in the US Public Health Service, Winslow, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Dental Medicine (DMD)

Schools Attended: Asbury College, 1979; University of Louisville School of Dentistry, 1996, DMD; Dental Advanced General Practice Residency, 2003

Area of Focus/Specialty: General Dentist, Advanced General Practice Residency

“Providing dental care to the Navajo people makes me proud every day”.

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

When I was growing up, my parents told me, “Don’t be like us (being shepherders), go to school and become a doctor.” That stuck in my head and has been a motivator for me to pursue a career in the healthcare profession.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I always enjoyed science, technology and helping people, so it seemed natural to pursue a healthcare profession, such as dentistry.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

Some of my obstacles were similar to the obstacles facing most Navajos, as can be seen in the 2000 Census of the Navajo Reservation: the average per capita income for a Navajo person residing on the Navajo Reservation is \$6,217; 56% of Indian persons on the Navajo Reservation live below the poverty level and 43% of labor force on the Navajo Reservation is unemployed. Looks like not much has changed since 1992 when I was admitted to University of Louisville School of Dentistry. In my book, hard work is the only thing that can beat these overwhelming odds.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I work at a dental clinic in Dilkon, Arizona as a Commander in the US Public Health Service. I am the Deputy Chief of a complex dental unit, supporting the Dental Chief with the dental program. Providing dental care to the Navajo people makes me proud every day.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Most students get discouraged when they focus on the amount of time and commitment that is needed for school or training in a health career. My advice to students would be to not let that deter them from achieving their dreams. Looking back, getting an education was worth every challenge. Why? Because the only thing better than looking forward to going to work each day is knowing that I am making a difference in other people’s lives.

What would you like to see for your tribe’s future?

I would like to see the quality of care to continue to improve, and to see the Indian Health Service become a national model of comprehensive healthcare service delivery.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

No, I don't.

Alberta McCabe

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Current Position: Registered Nurse (RN) Diabetes Educator, Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC), Phoenix, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE)

Schools Attended: Glendale Community College, 1992, ADN; Arizona State University, 1994, BSN

Area of Focus/Specialty: Diabetes Education

“My job is to help patients to live well with diabetes by teaching them how to manage the disease.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

This is my second professional career choice. Originally, I went to school for engineering and quickly realized that it was not for me. Shortly afterwards, I started working at a laboratory and that is when my interest in healthcare was sparked. Although I was interested, I was unsure which field in health care to pursue. It was during the time I was in the hospital having my children that I realized what I wanted to do. I noticed how caring the nurses were and how hard they worked to make me comfortable. They took the time to answer my questions. I admired them because they took the time to explain things and calm me. I realized then that a career in nursing is what I wanted. My greatest inspiration came from one particular obstetric (OB) nurse who was my greatest inspiration to become a nurse.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

My experiences in engineering in school made me realize that I was definitely not happy working with numbers. My mother said that I always had a caring heart, from the time when I was a young child. She said that I would take care of other people. If someone had a splinter, I wanted to take it out. I am fortunate that I chose this profession because I thoroughly and completely enjoy what I do.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I think the biggest obstacle was deciding to go back to school fulltime while being a mother to three children. I worked hard to make time to show them how much I loved them; finding the time to spend with them was a major heartache for me. I spent many hours studying late into the night because that was when they were asleep and the house was quiet.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I am a diabetes educator as well as a program coordinator for the D.E.P.T.H. Program which is the Diabetes Education Path to Health program at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center. My job is to help patients to live well with diabetes by teaching them how to manage the disease.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

You can do it. We all have obstacles in our lives and we all have reasons why we feel we cannot do it, but we can overcome these huge obstacles and barriers. Just being Native American is a plus because there are so many opportunities out there for us; there are scholarships, job offers, summer programs, etc. There is so much support out there, you just have to search for it. People are very “gung-ho” about helping Native

Americans complete their higher education and we should take advantage of that.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see the tribe take a stronger and more focused approach towards the social issues that affect the Navajo Nation. Right now, the rates of alcoholism, domestic abuse and child abuse are very high. This brings down the moral fiber of our tribal members. I think we need to focus more on teaching our young people and children right from wrong, as well as values and positive self-esteem, so that when they become adults they are able to withstand difficult issues and obstacles that come their way. I think it starts with the development of good social programs to support and help our young people.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I don't practice traditional medicine. However, my parents are traditional and believe in the traditional healing practices. I do believe that traditional ceremonies do help a person. I don't know how much it helps people physically, but mentally and spiritually I believe it is a very good healing practice. I have patients that still practice traditional medicine. Some patients are afraid to try western (conventional) medicine and prefer using the traditional healing route first before they try anything else.

Shannon Myers

Tribal Affiliation: Chickasaw

Current Position: Program Director, Native American Breast Care Clinic, Department of General Surgery, Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC), Phoenix, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Nurse Practitioner- Certified (FNP-C)

Schools Attended: West Chester University, 1993, BSN; University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill, 1999, MSN

Area of Focus/Specialty: Family Practice, Breast Health and Breast Cancer

“Students should try to volunteer and not be afraid to ask for experiences or ask questions.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

As a nurse, I am involved with very personal moments in the lives of my patients. Through my training I am able to make a difference. There are so many opportunities and avenues for a nurse such as, direct patient care, executive/administration, teaching and research.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I was one of those people who did not find my calling right away. I returned to school in my late 20's after a close friend of mine was involved in a motorcycle accident. I would visit him often in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and I always felt at home. I then volunteered in the same hospital for 6 months before I decided to apply to nursing school. My volunteer experience in the hospital really helped me decide on pursuing a career in nursing.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

Returning to school was a big obstacle. I began the nursing program in my late 20's with no prior healthcare experience. I had to prove to the university that I was worthy of a slot in the nursing program. Unfortunately, I was on probation for the first semester of school and I have to admit that it was difficult getting used to homework, papers and finals after 10 years. When I returned to graduate school in my 30's, I had to work every weekend so that I could attend school during the week and still pay my bills.

What do you do in your current job?

I have been a Family Nurse Practitioner in the Department of General Surgery at Phoenix Indian Medical Center for the past seven years. For the last three years I have served as the Program Director for the Native American Breast Care Clinic that Dr. Tillman, Chief of General Surgery, and I started. This clinic was established about 4 years ago as a specialized clinic for patients needing further work-ups and care for breast related health issues. I am proud to say that our facility offers breast reconstruction surgery for Native American women who have faced or are currently facing breast cancer.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

My advice would be no different for anyone; you need to follow your heart and your passion. At the end of the day, if you are really happy about what you do, then you are living a good life. The healthcare field is vast with opportunities. Students should try to volunteer and not be afraid to ask for experiences or ask questions.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

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I am very proud to call myself a member of the Chickasaw Nation. We are at the forefront when it comes to helping our elders and our children, as well as our community at-large. I would like to see the Chickasaw Nation continue to be at the forefront of helping those among our tribe who need healthcare assistance, and I look forward to the opening of our new hospital in Ada, Oklahoma.

Patricia Nez Henderson



Tribal Affiliation: Diné (Navajo)

Current Position: Vice President, Black Hills Center for American Indian Health

Health Professional Degree(s): Master of Public Health (MPH), Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: University of Arizona, 1990, BS; Yale University School of Public Health, 1994, MPH; Yale University School of Medicine, 2000, MD

Area of Focus/Specialty: Public Health with an emphasis on tobacco control & prevention

“The longest journey for an individual is 12 inches: distance between your heart and your mind.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

For the past ten years I have worked in tobacco control and prevention. I enjoy every aspect of my work because it allows me to work directly with Native American communities while using all the skills I have learned in medicine and public health. Smoking is the most preventable cause of death; yet many Native American communities do not have comprehensive tobacco control and prevention programs. In many of these communities, rates of commercial tobacco use are 2-3 times higher than the general population. This, of course, results in high rates of smoking-related diseases including cancer, heart disease, and respiratory diseases—which are the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in American Indians and Alaska Natives. There is a great need for more American Indian and Alaska Native health professionals to address this very important public health issue.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

Initially, I wanted to be a practicing physician—a dream I had since I was 5 years old. I majored in biochemistry at the University of Arizona with the intentions of going to medical school. Upon graduating with my bachelors of science degree, I decided to first obtain my masters of public health with an emphasis in health policy. This two year experience allowed me to understand health from a community perspective. With this enriching experience I applied to and was accepted at Yale University School of Medicine. My expectation of the delivery of allopathic medicine was high. However, to my dismay, this form of medicine was not as holistic as I had witnessed among our Navajo traditional healers. The experience caused a disconnect from my head and heart. Despite this I continued to pursue my medical degree. Then during my third year, I began to do some of my clinical rotations with Indian Health Service on the Navajo Nation. This experience made me realize that Native American communities needed health advocates who not only understood the etiologies of diseases but also understand the importance of social, cultural, and environmental factors related to disease prevention and intervention. By my fourth year, I knew I did not want to practice medicine, but to devote my career in public health. Upon graduating from medical school, I spent an additional two years in a post-doctoral program that prepared me for a career in public health. It is true; the longest journey for an individual is 12 inches: distance between your heart and your mind. However, once you reconnect your heart to your mind, your inner essence embraces every experience you have encountered. This has been true for me with my medical school experience.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I graduated from high school with honors so I thought I was prepared when I came to the University of Arizona. During my first and second year of college, I quickly came across obstacles that were definitely challenging for me. I decided to take some time off during my third year and worked at an Indian Health Service facility as a

nursing assistant. During that time, the daily exposure I had with the patients and doctors encouraged me to get back into school. I think that was the first challenge, which was to realize and reaffirm that this is the dream I wanted to pursue. The second challenge came during my second year in medical school, where I was the only Native American student at Yale. During that time, I met Wilma Mankiller (first female Chief of the Cherokee Nation) during an AISES conference. I remember crying and telling her that I wanted to quit because the Dean of the medical school wanted me to transfer to a school that catered more to Native American students. I remember her words exactly, “Are you done crying? You may never know in your lifetime the impact that you will have on others. But there might be other students like you who want to go to Yale or want to be doctors. Do it for them!” With those encouraging words, it really reaffirmed my dedication and my desire to complete medical school and it has just been a phenomenal process up to this point.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I am the vice president of the Black Hills Center for American Indian Health (BHCAIH). It is a nonprofit, community-based Native organization whose primary focus is to enhance the health of Native American tribes and communities through research, education, service, and ultimately philanthropy. We currently have comprehensive research programs that address health issues, including commercial tobacco use, cancer, environmental justice, and others. As a public health professional, I work with tribal communities to define health issues that address tobacco control and prevention. I then identify grant opportunities that will provide funding resources to address this health issue. My postdoctoral training has prepared me to write grants for the National Institutes of Health, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and other health organizations. My role on the project varies depending on the type of project. Currently, I am also the project leader and investigator on several tobacco control and prevention programs, including the establishment of comprehensive tobacco control programs for the Navajo Nation as well as for other Native American communities.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

My advice for those students who are interested in pursuing a career in medicine is first to know that it is a very difficult process; but, if this is a true desire of the heart then it is possible. One key and important advice is to seek mentors at all levels of education (e.g. high school, college, graduate school, medical school, etc.). Students need to identify individuals who can help them navigate through the process. My mentors, especially those from my childhood, and those during and after medical school have helped me tremendously in my health career path. However, I have learned that these mentors can only assist me if I keep the lines of communication open between us. Today, I have several key mentors and I make sure I continue to stay in contact with them.

What would you like to see for your tribe’s future?

The Navajo Nation has a philosophy of Hozhó, meaning the beauty and balance of every living thing that surrounds us. This system of beauty and balance is very fragile; any element that is not supposed to be there can jeopardize this system. As a physician and as a public health advocate, I would like our tribe to embrace the philosophy of Hozhó in all walks of life. Hozhó means that you embrace wellness and are doing the right things for yourself and others to promote longevity. In tobacco control and prevention, I believe Hozhó is a very important philosophy. Over the decades, the tobacco industry has introduced their own form of philosophy into our lives, thus affected our Native culture, tradition and values. As a result, we have high rates of commercial tobacco use among our people and we embrace policies endorsed by the tobacco industry that continue to harm ourselves and others. I urge our Navajo leaders to once again re-embrace the principles of Hozhó and support efforts that will protect the health of all people. This I believe is the true meaning of Hozhó.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

In my work with the Navajo Nation, we work very closely with a group of Navajo traditional healers known as the Hataalii Association. In their practices, they use dzil nato’ (mountain tobacco) for ceremonial purposes. Therefore, our partnership with this organization has been vital in mobilizing the Navajo Nation towards the implementation of a comprehensive tobacco control and prevention program.

A portrait of Gerlinda Silversmith, a woman with dark, wavy hair, wearing a dark top and a necklace. She is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with greenery.

Gerlinda Silversmith

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Current Position: Chief Nurse Executive, Hopi Health Care Center, Polacca, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN), Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN); Master of Science in Nursing (MSN)

Schools Attended: University of New Mexico, 1986, ADN; University of Phoenix, 2003, BSN; University of Phoenix, 2005, MSN

Area of Focus/Specialty: Perioperative Nursing, Nursing Recruitment, Nursing Administration

“Perseverance is the key to a successful future. Don’t give up, keep going!”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

There are several reasons why I chose nursing as a health professional career. Mainly, I wanted to take care of the elderly. Nursing is a broad spectrum of specialties. You have so many fields from which to choose.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

The ability to cope with the stress level of being a nurse, the ability to work independently, and the ability to meet, deal, and communicate with patients.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

Being a leader is more challenging today than ever before. The demands for higher quality and performance are increasing, and the workplace is growing ever more complex. The nursing shortage crisis has also impacted nearly every health care organization.

What do you do in your current job?

As the chief nurse executive, I have the overall professional nursing leadership responsibility. In this capacity, I exercise full managerial duties and accountability for the planning, organization, and administration of nursing services.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Perseverance is the key to a successful future. Don’t give up, keep going! Find a mentor. Mentoring is needed to create a solid foundation and to help you to become the best quality health care provider possible. Being mentored promotes professional development and job satisfaction by pairing you with someone higher up the academic ladder who can guide you on your path toward your educational and career goals.

What would you like to see for your tribe’s future?

I would like to see the tribe take charge of their health, increase more awareness on prevention initiatives, and empower patients to achieve optimal health.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

As a health care provider, it is essential to support traditional medicine. I believe traditional medicine improves the spiritual well-being of a patient. A healing environment must consist of physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Stacy Talahytewa Jr.

Tribal Affiliation: Hopi, Cochiti Pueblo

Current Position: Radiologic Technologist, Indian Health Service, Hopi Health Care Center (HHCC), Polacca, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Associate of Applied Science Degree (AAS)

Schools Attended: Pima Community College, 2002, AAS

Area of Focus/Specialty: X-ray, Computed Tomography (CT)

“A strong support system can make a huge difference and I am forever thankful to my family for standing beside me for many years.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I really didn't know what I wanted to do as a career until my brother-in-law, Clarence Myron, introduced me to radiology and all the great opportunities it provided. I will always give him credit for steering me in this direction. Currently, he is a sonographer at Hopi Health Care Center and has been a wonderful role model for a great part of my life.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I remember getting an X-ray of my ankle one time. It was a very interesting process to watch the technologists go about their duties. I also thought about the economy. I figured that no matter how bad our economy may get, there will always be a need for health care professionals. With this thought in mind, I figured radiology would be a secure profession, and so far, it has been a very rewarding career.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

The biggest challenge for me was leaving my family, my village, and the reservation to attend college in a major city. I think this is a challenge that a lot of Native students face. There is also the adjustment to the fast pace of city life and culture shock for many students. Luckily, I was able to overcome this obstacle by looking at the bigger picture. I knew getting a college education was something I really needed to accomplish in order to succeed in my life. It was just a matter of being patient and dealing with one barrier at a time. A strong support system can make a huge difference, and I am forever thankful to my family for standing beside me for many years.

What do you do in your current job?

In my current job, I provide X-ray and computed tomography (CT) services for the Hopi community. Thanks to our current supervisor, Marjorie Chinnock, I have been given the opportunity to learn Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) as well.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Take some time to shadow someone in your field of interest and see if that particular health profession is something you really want to do. Be sure to check out several areas and don't limit yourself. It is important to keep other doors of opportunity open. Always remember that at the end of the day, it's all about providing quality patient care.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see my tribe be healthy and happy. I would also like to see the Hopi Health Care Center increase its services for our patients by expanding the in-patient unit, for example, by providing surgical procedures, etc. By offering more services, our patients can avoid the burden of having to travel a great distance for some of these services.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

Yes, I do. It is our way of life as Hopi people, and without it, we lose part of our identity. As for western medicine, I don't think it addresses every aspect of a patient. Traditional medicine is able to provide spiritual healing, which is often a missing component in western medicine.

Michael Truesdell

Tribal Affiliation: White Mountain Apache

Current Position: Chief, Department of Family Medicine, Commander US Public Health Service, Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation, Tuba City, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: Arizona State University, 1984, Bachelor of Science (BS) in Biology; US Army Infantry School, Fort Benning, GA, 1985; University of Arizona, 1992, Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Psychology; University of Arizona College of Medicine, 1996, MD

Area of Focus/Specialty: Family Medicine

“If you are having problems or obstacles, the best thing you can do for yourself is fall back and regroup, but do not quit.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose my field of work in order to serve Native American communities. I knew I had the interest and ability to serve as a physician. After rotating through several Indian Health Service (IHS) hospitals and clinics, I found that family medicine was an area of high need. Throughout IHS, primary care is still needed in both rural and urban settings.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

The biggest obstacle was money. I didn't have enough money to help support my family and to go to school. It was very difficult to work and go to school at the same time.

When my mother lost her job, I had to start working full time as a nursing assistant at the Maricopa County Hospital Psychiatric Annex. I would work the night shift from 11:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. and go to school during the day. I did poorly that semester and had to retake some of the courses, but I kept at it.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a family doctor in a 638 bed tribal hospital at the service unit in Tuba City, AZ. I do full spectrum family medicine except obstetrics. I work in both major areas of medicine; inpatient medicine which means in the hospital wards, and outpatient medicine which involves ambulatory clinic care.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Do not give up on your goals. Work hard and stay focused. If you are having problems or obstacles, the best thing you can do for yourself is fall back and regroup, but do not quit.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I do not practice traditional medicine, however, if a patient wants a medicine man or a ceremony, I encourage it, as long as it does not substantially delay care or harm the patient.

Deborah Reyhner Tsingine

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Current Position: Family Practice Physician,
Department of Family Medicine, Phoenix Indian
Medical Center (PIMC), Phoenix, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Medicine
(MD)

Schools Attended: Montana State University, 1996,
BS; University of Colorado School of Medicine, 2000,
MD; Good Samaritan Family Medicine Residency, 2003

Area of Focus/Specialty: Family Medicine

*“If you allow things to distract you, especially
as an undergraduate student, your school
will suffer for it.”*

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Medicine took me a little more time to define because it wasn't something I dreamed of doing from early on. As an undergraduate, I initially started out as an engineering major but quickly lost interest in that. With the help of my advisors and talking to other students who were interested in the health professions, I decided to take more biology and science classes. My interests sort of grew from there and also when I started working for the Minority Biomedical Research Support Program at Montana State University which really peaked my interest in medicine.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

During the summer of 1994, I did the Minority Medical Education Program (MMEP) in Tucson, AZ. MMEP gave me a brief glimpse of what clinical medicine was like and it also helped me prepare for the MCAT and made medical school a little more attainable to me. I think MMEP was a good place to start.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

I can't say I've had tremendous obstacles, but I know that some of the distractions that I had, especially as an undergraduate, could have easily derailed my focus from school. I managed to stay on task although I think it's very easy for college students to fall off track. When I started as an undergraduate at Montana State University, there were probably about ten Native American students in my little social circle who started the freshmen year with me. Only one or two of us came back the following year. So that alone really narrowed down the number of Native American college students pretty quickly.

What do you do in your current job?

Right now, I work in the primary care clinic at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC). I primarily see patients in the outpatient clinic and on occasion I do some inpatient work. I also work in the labor and delivery deck and some outpatient pediatric clinic work as well.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Don't let other people or other things distract you. School is a full time commitment and to pursue a career in medicine is a very full time commitment. If you allow things to distract you, especially as an undergraduate student, your school will suffer for it.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I think I would like to see a continued commitment to increasing education and resources for the Navajo Nation, particularly the scholarship program. I think that has been a wonderful resource for Navajo students, which dates back to the 1970s when the Navajo Nation President, Peter McDonald, set up the Navajo Nation Scholarship program. They were forward looking people who realized that our people are our greatest resource.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I don't practice traditional medicine. My training is in allopathic medicine. I think there is a role for traditional medicine but I do not have that training.

Janet Vargas

Tribal Affiliation: Choctaw

Current Position: Psychiatry Resident, Post-Graduate Year 2

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: University of Texas El Paso, 1971, Bachelor of Science (BS) in Education; University of Phoenix, 1991, Master's in Counseling; University of Arizona College of Medicine, 2006, MD

Area of Focus/Specialty: Psychiatry

"I've learned that as you're traveling this road, you need people who are there to help and encourage you to go on."

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Becoming a doctor was a life-long dream. As a little girl, I was ill with pneumonia several times and my parents could not afford to take me to a doctor or a hospital. Luckily, the neighborhood doctor would come by and see me every day before going to his office, and again after work. As a result of his compassion, I began to think, "That's what I want to be, when I grow up. I want to be a doctor." I've come to believe that someone's mental status and mental health have a lot to do with their physical health and well-being. This realization made psychiatry the perfect choice for me.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

My first career was in education. As a teacher, I found that if I spent more time with students and their families and talked them through any troubling issues, I was able to see more success in the classroom. Those experiences fueled my interest in counseling, eventually leading to a master's degree in counseling. My love for medicine and my commitment to community service soon gave me the opportunity to go to medical school. Medical school and clinical rotations gave me the opportunity to experience many different areas in medicine. I purposely left my psychiatry rotation to the very end of my fourth year, believing that I had to set aside all of my past experiences and delve into something new. I thought that if I really wanted to go into psychiatry, by then it would be too late. That was a mistake on my part, because, when I did my psychiatry rotation, I found that my passion for working in the mental health field was stronger than ever. It was good to see people get well mentally, and then see them experience improved physical health. The rotation confirmed that "This is where I needed to be." I spent the year after graduation teaching and doing research in areas that were of interest to me, making sure there wasn't something else I wanted to do. That year I confirmed that psychiatry was the right choice for me.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

The obstacles and barriers that I encountered were not particular to just my medical or health career. As a minority female growing up in a lower socioeconomic neighborhood, there were many barriers to receiving a strong and solid educational background. I definitely got the impression that high school was a place where educators thought, "You probably won't finish high school, why are you talking about going to college?" At one point, I actually had a counselor tell me that I wasn't college material. I had to rise above that, and do well in school so that I could attend my local university. Having always been a good student, I had new barriers challenging me at the university. In my case, there was the problem of knowing when and where to seek help. It was a struggle realizing that although I may be smart, and the only person in my family to attend college, it was okay not to know what to do; but, more importantly to know that the smartest thing I could do, was ask

for help when I needed it. These were things I didn't know because they weren't taught or encouraged in school. While my parents supported my dreams, they did not know how to help me navigate the system for higher education. Barriers are placed to stop the people who do not want "it" badly enough. Overcoming barriers requires perseverance, and the ability to say, and believe, "I know I can do this." I've certainly been knocked down a few times, but I know that it's all about getting up one more time, no matter how painful it is. It's about having perseverance, and surrounding yourself with people who believe in you, because it's very easy to tell your story, and have someone say to you, "Ah, you can't do that" or "Nobody has ever been able to do that. What makes you think you can do that?" When you come across people like this, it's important to be respectful of these people, and then realize in your own head, "Okay, well I respect this person's opinion although that's not what I believe. Therefore, I will just have to find someone else who can believe, support, and help me with the skills I need to move on." Oddly enough, at this point in my life, my biggest barrier is my age. I know that there are legislations prohibiting age discrimination, but I have learned that it is covertly evident. I know that we will always have barriers to overcome. We just need to want "it" badly enough to overcome whatever barrier comes our way. I know that I am receiving excellent training in my residency, and that soon I will be qualified to be a practicing psychiatrist, and I will be prepared to overcome the next barrier. It's an extra step convincing people that my age doesn't have anything to do with my ability. When I look back at the many barriers I have overcome, I know how badly I want to complete my training. I hope to break that age barrier, because age definitely has its benefits.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I am a second year psychiatry resident. I work with patients who have mental health problems. I also rotate through different areas of psychiatry and medicine to broaden my background in psychiatry. Currently, I'm on the detoxification unit, and work with patients who struggle with alcohol and/or substance abuse. The detox program at the VA is a six month program that helps veterans to learn the key skills they need to gain and maintain sobriety. It involves a lot of education, support, and encouragement to help them change their way of thinking, which is similar to what I did as a teacher. I've learned that as you're traveling this road, you need people who are there to help and encourage you to go on. So this type of work is perfect for me. I also work with patients in the emergency department and patients admitted to the inpatient psychiatric unit at the hospital.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

The same message that I've given many times is, "Don't ever give up." Somebody gave me similar advice many years ago. That person said, "It doesn't really matter that you have a career in mind when you start high school or college, but what does matter is that you make good grades because as long as you make good grades you keep doors open." So if I had to give any advice it would be to work hard in school, look for help if you're struggling with something, and don't be so prideful that you don't seek out help. If you're further along in school, or even out of school by the time you're reading this, don't feel that you're completely out of the picture now. Go get some counseling from someone who can point out what you need to do to overcome whatever deficiencies you may have. My other piece of advice would be to have perseverance, because it is inevitable that you will fall down or get knocked down a few times along the way. It takes a lot of perseverance to remember, "I need to get up one more time." Sometimes, getting up one more time requires you to have a friend there to help pull you up. My last piece of advice would be to always look for someone who can help you reach your next goal, and then always remember to help someone else so they can reach their goal.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

The tribe is pretty forward in their thinking and I would like to continue to see that. For the younger generation, I think we worry as an older generation that we may have coddled our young people too much. In doing so, we may have deprived them of developing some of the skills needed to put forth that extra effort to, "get up one more time." So I would definitely like to see tribes continue with some of the programs that they have to encourage youth to go into all areas of life, whether it is professional or non-professional. We need the youth in all areas and we need them to be able to work together. I think that the concept of unity is what makes Native American tribes in and of themselves unique versus the "What about me?" thought and behavior of mainstream America.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

I do practice traditional medicine. I grew up that way, so for me it is a way of life, and it's kind of hard to separate. Just as I have respect for traditional medicine, I have equal respect for western medicine. As a resident, I have to be careful in the way I address and approach traditional medicine. When the opportunity does arise, I certainly take the time to educate my peers. Attending physicians are usually willing to allow me the opportunity to approach the subject with the patients we see. So, I do think that it's important to learn how to be proactive, and talk to your attending physicians and peers about the impact of traditional medicine. Oddly enough, a lot of the traditional medicine I grew up with is now being researched, and showing evidence that it works and that our ancestors were right! So, for me, it's really about knowing when to speak up and say, "Oh, did you read this article?" or "Have you read about this?" I do believe that once I have my own practice, traditional medicine will definitely be a part of how I practice medicine.

Kelly A. Vitz

Tribal Affiliation: Hopi

Current Position: Acting Physical Therapy Supervisor, Hopi Health Care Center (HHCC), Polacca, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Masters of Science & Health Science in Physical Therapy (MSHSPT)

Schools Attended: Texas A&M University, 2002, Bachelor of Science (BS) in Biology with a minor in Chemistry and Psychology; George Washington University, 2005, MSHSPT

Area of Focus/Specialty: Physical Therapy

“It has taken a lot of self-motivation and determination to get to where I am today.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

As a young teen, I was exposed to the world of physical therapy when a close friend of mine injured her knee. I was impressed with the knowledge the therapists had regarding the human body and their ability to help patients regain body function(s) in order to return to a comfortable way of life. I was also impressed with how rapidly one could observe the results and progress, when using different therapeutic activities and exercise. That day I made a commitment to pursue a career in physical therapy.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

I shadowed many different health professionals during high school (physicians, nurses, dentists, etc.). I later volunteered at an outpatient sports clinic as an undergraduate student. After I obtained my B.S. degree, I decided to work as a full-time physical therapy technician for one year. This opportunity allowed me to experience the different specialties within physical therapy.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

My journey to attain a career as a physical therapist has been a challenging road. It has taken a lot of self-motivation and determination to get to where I am today. Although school was very competitive, it was a great life adventure that I do not regret. The availability of finances was also a constant challenge. Financial aid loans and the Indian Health Service Scholarship helped me a great deal during my education.

What do you do in your current job?

I am currently the Acting Physical Therapy Supervisor here at the Hopi Health Care Center on the Hopi Reservation. I supervise two physical therapy assistants within our out-patient facility. I treat patients of various ages and their injuries, such as ankle sprains, spinal cord injuries, vertigo and wound care. Because we are located in a remote and isolated area, we attempt to provide as much outpatient P.T. service as possible to help our patients return to and maintain a functional lifestyle.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

My advice to you is... don't be intimidated by your obstacles, no matter what they are. Set your goals and perform your best. Never lose sight of the big picture no matter how hard it gets. Your desire to achieve, will allow you to succeed. My grandfather used to say, "Any man who is willing to try to do any job or accept any challenge, is bound to have moments of frustration and failure. And if he be a wise man, he will learn much from his failure and be in a better position to meet the challenges of the future."

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What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see the development of our current health care clinic. It would be a blessing to provide more specialty services to the community. I believe patient education is always important; therefore, I would like to see more emphasis upon patient advocacy as well as more patient education concerning his/her health and the healthcare system. This will allow the patient to become more proactive in their health care decisions.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

No.

Norma T. Walks

Tribal Affiliation: Oglala Sioux

Current Position: General Surgery Resident, 4th year, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: Black Hills State University, 2000; University of Minnesota Medical School-Twin Cities, 2004, MD

Area of Focus/Specialty: General Surgery

“Find the other Indians, even it is just an email or phone call. We are out here and we want to help you!”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose surgery because I like how surgeons approach problems; it fit well with my methods of problem solving and it is a very practical, concrete way to deal with complex medical issues. I also like how the cross-sections of medicine are heavily incorporated into surgery. In addition to being the surgeon, I have to understand internal medicine, radiology, pediatrics, anesthesiology, and critical care, just to name a few. It's also very satisfying to have an immediate sense of accomplishment, and I love being able to use my technical expertise to help people. When things go as planned, my patients come to me sick, and I send them away better. I never get over just how cool that really is.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

When I was a senior in high school, I took a job as a certified nurse's aide at a nursing home. Although it was a difficult job on many levels, I needed the work and surprisingly, I found myself enjoying it more than I thought I would. In one enlightening experience, a family practice doctor was doing rounds on his patients admitted to the nursing home, and needed my help dressing a resident's chronic leg wound. There was something about how he dealt with the problem that made me realize I wanted to work in this field; I wanted to become a doctor. I never looked at another profession seriously after this experience.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

The biggest obstacle for me was getting used to the culture of the medical community. I am the first doctor in my family, so there was no one to help prepare me for the culture of medicine. I didn't know what to expect. Many of my classmates were the children of doctors and scientists, or of an upper-class background; I was not. It didn't help that I was Native American and a woman. There were very few Native physicians to act as mentors, and those who were around were not surgeons. Even though I had to do a lot on my own, everyone in medical school was very welcoming. In the end, all medical students are very similar; tired, overwhelmed and more than a little scared about what is expected of us. My classmates and I became one giant family.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I am a general surgery resident, which entails learning how to perform in both surgery and patient care. I am basically working like crazy to master my chosen specialty. In addition to taking care of my patients, I am also responsible for running a surgical service. I make sure my Attending physicians are fully informed about what is going on, assign operative cases, as well as teaching the junior residents. All the while, I try to absorb as much as possible from my teachers. It is very challenging, hard work, but worth it.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

Understand that it won't always be easy for a lot of reasons. It's hard for the non-Natives too. There will be setbacks and failures because we come from such different places than many of our classmates. Find the other Indians, even if it's just an email or a phone call. We are out here, and we want to help you! It really helps to be able to talk about what it's like to be the only Indian in the room sometimes.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see my tribe continue to take our future into our own hands. The influx of casino money has really opened some doors, but we still have a long road ahead.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

No.

Lorraine Whitehair

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

Current Position: Public Health Nutritionist, Federal government

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), Master of Public Health (MPH)

Schools Attended: Pacific Union College, 1973, Bachelor of Science (BS) in Nutritional Science; University of Utah, 1976, BSN; University of California School of Public Health, 1978, MPH

Area of Focus/Specialty: Clinical practice in Nursing and Nutrition, Hospital Food Service Management, Public Health Nutrition

“Self-assessment guides you in developing a plan to improve areas of weakness.”

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

When I was in high school, students were asked to participate in career-day activities. I thought about the conditions on my reservation and knew of the great need in my own community. My family and other Navajos living in my community were poor. I wished that the conditions (impassible roads; inadequate housing; access to medical facilities, care, water and electricity availability; and other health disparities) were better. With this in mind, I thought about a career in the health care field that would provide me with a way to help American Indian people.

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

When I graduated from high school, I had a summer job as a nurse’s aide/translator working in a private non-profit hospital in southern Utah. This job gave me an opportunity to work in a hospital setting, which gave me hands-on experience working with the medical staff and clients. After one year of nursing practice in a southern California university hospital intensive care unit, I traveled to the Philippines as a volunteer to assist two graduate students as they completed a public health field project. On my first day there, after settling into a hut in a small coastal village, I saw tetanus in a newborn. This inspired me to develop a plan to educate and train several community midwives on how to improve sanitation techniques during and after delivery of an infant. This work experience in a community setting gave me the opportunity to observe first hand the importance of public health. I decided to return to the United States and complete a degree in nutrition science with a master’s in public health.

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

When I lived on my reservation as a child, I was not encouraged or given an opportunity to plan ahead. My parents and grandparents planned for the family garden, harvest, and spring sheep shearing. In college, my science professor asked me to develop a professional plan. I did not know how to develop a simple plan. Practice in developing these professional plans helped me improve my skills at writing goals, developing and implementing the plans, and setting priorities. My family spoke in our native language at home. English is my second language. Learning to speak and write in English was difficult for me. When I started school, I was embarrassed about not pronouncing English words correctly and having a heavy Navajo accent. In addition, the schools I attended did not address my need to improve my reading and writing skills. When I attended college the first time, I had great difficulty. I took remedial and intermediate level writing classes in college, wrote daily journals, and read interesting books/journals. I also had tutors for certain classes and joined study groups for most science classes.

What do you do in your current job?

I work for the federal government. This branch works to develop partnerships to effectively address public health issues, including epidemiology, behavioral research, surveillance, development of interventions, health promotion, policy and environmental change, communication and social marketing. I am a member of this team that focuses on the public health of the American Indian/Alaska Native population.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

One bit of important advice is your approach to improving your professional development and skills. This requires you to start a routine self-assessment, peer evaluation, and supervisor, professor, and teacher evaluation. Self-assessment guides you in developing a plan to improve areas of weakness. Your plan should continue to evolve as you grow. It is never too early or too late to start self-assessing as this gives you the substance needed to develop plans for improvement. It has been helpful for me to discover and realize that learning will continue throughout my life.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

My hope is to see the Navajo tribal government and/or leaders become engaged in running the day-to-day business operations of the health care industry. Once the tribal leaders learn the public health principles and philosophy, the tribal leaders will be in a position to know best how to effectively address the public health issues of the people living on the Navajo reservation.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

No, I do not practice traditional medicine; however, I use tea found on the Navajo reservation and certain types of traditional food additives in preparing traditional foods. In the Navajo culture, the traditional healing practices involve the participation of the entire family and community. There is much that can be said about healing through a supportive environment. Traditional medicines have their important place as well as conventional medicine.

Margaret Zavala

Tribal Affiliation: Pascua Yaqui

Current Position: Dental Assistant

Health Professional Certificate: Dental Assistant Certificate (CDA)

Schools Attended: Apollo College, 2008, CDA

Area of Focus/Specialty: Dental

“I feel very lucky and blessed to work with my own people.”

What experiences did you have to make sure this profession was right for you?

Growing up as a migrant worker, my mom was a single parent. I didn't have my first dental visit until I was 14 years old. My mom had passed away by that time and it was my uncle who took my sisters and me to see a dentist. The three of us all had some pretty severe oral issues. I remember that was the only reason why he took us. After our check-up, I remember the dentist stressing to my uncle how important it was for us to see a dentist. I will never forget that moment. I always thought if I ever have kids that this would be an area I would stay on top of. Even now, I tell my little cousins how important it is to take care of their teeth. I tell them, “It's not just your oral health that you need to care for, but your overall health too.”

Describe any obstacles or barriers to success that you encountered along your health professional career path. How did you overcome them?

The financial burden of taking out school loans was an obstacle my husband and I both encountered. I was working at Circle K and knew there was no way I could pay for my tuition on my own. My husband already had a huge school loan and we weren't sure if I should take out an additional loan for my school. Financially, it would have been a big burden on both of us. Luckily, I was able to go through the tribe and apply for financial aid through a program called the “Workforce Investment Act.” They awarded me two scholarships so that I wouldn't have to take out any loans. By the first week, my tuition was paid and I was pretty much ready to roll. I was able to focus on my school and not worry about that extra bill each month.

What do you do in your current job?

As a dental assistant, I work with interns, residents, and contracted doctors, so we're very busy. In our clinic, I have the opportunity to work with several Pascua Yaqui tribal members. I feel very lucky and blessed that I'm able to work with my own people. I also like the fact that the cost of treatment is not really an issue here, because most of the cost is covered by the tribe. I work at another private office in Tucson and money tends to be an issue for most patients there. But working here at the Pascua Yaqui clinic, it is very rewarding to know that we are able to provide the needed services for our patients at no cost.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers?

The dental field is a very rewarding career. I would like to see more Native students pursue a career in dentistry. If you're willing to work hard and be productive, you can succeed in this line of work.

What would you like to see for your tribe's future?

I would like to see a hospital built for the Pascua Yaqui community. I would feel very proud to see many Native Americans including a majority of the tribal community working there. It would give me a great joy. I think there should be more educational outreach and disease prevention as far as eating right and staying fit goes. Diabetes is like wildfire here. My mother had it, and I have a few uncles who have heart disease which is also on the rise in the community. I think if we could get our people to be more mobile and eat a little healthier, we could see some changes.

Do you practice traditional medicine? If you do, then how does traditional medicine interact with conventional medicine?

No, I really don't practice traditional medicine. I've gone to alternative medicine a couple of times, but not on a regular basis.

For Further Information



The University of Arizona
Inter Tribal Council of Arizona
INMED
INDIANS INTO MEDICINE PROGRAM

UA/ITCA Indians Into Medicine (INMED) Program
500 N. Tucson Blvd., #110
Tucson AZ 85716

Phone: 520-318-7280
Fax: 520-318-7017
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Website: <http://inmed.fcm.arizona.edu>



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Phone: 520-621-5531
Toll Free: 1-800- 841-5948
Fax: 520-626-2895
Email: azhealth@email.arizona.edu
Website: <http://www.diversity.medicine.arizona.edu>

Resources

The following websites may be useful to you as you embark on your journey to become a health professional. This list is only a sample of resources and is not meant to be all-inclusive.

American Indian and Alaska Native Health Careers

Information about 11 different areas in the health professions and some of the steps you need to take to become a health professional. Read the inspiring stories of some of these professionals.

<http://aianhealthcareers.org/index.html>

Aspiring Docs

Read inspiring stories from medical students and doctors and share your views and opinions with other students who are thinking about medical school.

<http://www.AspiringDocs.org>

AZ Area Health Education Centers

Arizona AHEC strives to attract under-represented ethnic and racial students into the health professions and focuses its attention on supporting the state's health professionals with continuing training and career enhancements.

<http://www.azahec.org>

AZ Caring Careers

Health career programs in Arizona

<http://www.azcaringcareers.com/>

Considering a Medical Career

Find out what doctors do and how you can prepare for a rewarding career in medicine.

<http://www.aamc.org/students/considering/start.htm>

Explore Health Careers

Everything you want to know about a wide variety of health careers.

<http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>

Health Resource Guide

Online directory of health information including a directory to all U.S. medical, dental, pharmacy, and osteopathic schools. Learn about associations, licensing information, and state information in all areas of healthcare.

<http://www.healthguideusa.org/index.htm>

My Health Career

HealthCareer.net is part online discussion, part career information and part social network of all healthcare careers.

<http://www.myhealthcareer.net>

Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP)

Health programs, services, and resources for Native Americans in medicine.

<http://www.aaip.org>

American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES)

Supports American Indian and Alaska Natives in engineering, science and other related technology fields and offers financial, academic and cultural support from middle school through graduate school.

<http://www.aises.org/>

National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association (NANAINA)

Supports Alaska Native and American Indian students, nurses and allied health professionals through the development of leadership skills and continuing education.

<http://www.nanainanurses.org>

Society of American Indian Dentists (SAID)

Learn about the society including membership, news, announcements, and links to other resources for Indian students interested in dentistry.

<http://www.aaip.org/?page=SAID>

National Indian Health Board (NIHB)

NIHB is a non-profit organization that advocates on behalf of all Tribal Governments and American Indian and Alaska Natives in the development of national Indian health policy.

<http://www.nihb.org>

Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC)

Nonprofit group of medical schools, teaching hospitals, and academic societies.

www.aamc.org

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP)

Find out about a career in pharmacy including a directory of schools, student resources, and issues that they face.

www.aacp.org

American Dental Association (ADA)

Obtain more information in dentistry for health professionals and students.

<http://www.ada.org>

American Dental Education Association (ADEA)

Explore a career in dentistry and learn about the education pathway, dentistry admissions test (DAT), student resources, and conferences.

<http://www.adea.org>

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry

Learn about a career in optometry including information about the optometry admissions test (OAT) and student resources.

<http://www.opted.org>

American Indian College Fund

Native-operated organization and the nation's largest provider of private scholarships. Supports the nation's tribal colleges and universities and their students.

<http://www.collegefund.org/>

Indian Health Services (IHS)

Obtain information about scholarships including applications, search for job vacancies, and conferences.

<http://www.ihs.gov>

Gates Millennium Scholars (GMS)

Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, offers scholarships to students of diverse backgrounds.

<http://www.gmsp.org>

FastWeb

The largest free scholarship search on the web.

<http://www.fastweb.com/>

FinAid

Links to other scholarship databases including 180,000 private sector scholarships, fellowships, grants and loans from more than 3,000 sources.

<http://www.finaid.org/>

American College Testing (ACT)

General information about the ACT college entrance exam.

www.actstudent.org/

College Board

Find out how to prepare and register for the SAT®, the PSAT/NMSQT®, and the Advanced Placement Program® (AP®).

www.collegeboard.com

Dental Admission Test (DAT)

Find out how to prepare and register for the DAT. DAT guide, application, schedule of test dates, and sample test included.

<http://www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/>

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)

Find out how to prepare and register for the MCAT. Practice test and testing dates included.

<http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/>

Pharmacy College Admission Test (PCAT)

Find out how to prepare and register for the PCAT. Application, test dates, and practice test included.

<http://tpc-etesting.com/pcat/>

Graduate Record Examination (GRE)

Find out how to prepare and register for the GRE. Registration, test dates, and practice test included.

<http://www.ets.org/gre/>

Med-Start Summer Program

Five week academic summer program for low income, minority and first generation college-bound students interested in health careers.

<http://www.medstart.arizona.edu>

Summer Medical and Dental Program (SMDEP)

Six-week summer academic enrichment program that offers freshman and sophomore college students intensive and personalized medical and dental school preparation.

<http://www.smdep.org>

Summer Institute on Medical Ignorance (SIMI)

Seven week paid summer research program in which students gain experience working in a laboratory and explore health careers.

<http://www.ignorance.medicine.arizona.edu>

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