

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

**Volume 1
2008**



Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the American Indian and Alaska Native health professionals whose commitment, discipline and sacrifice have enabled them to achieve their dreams in spite of many obstacles they encountered along the 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 stories and encourage students to follow in their footsteps and to achieve their dreams.

We are grateful for all that you are doing to help people live healthier lives.

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

This book represents a dream of the partnership 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 College of Medicine at The University of Arizona. Our partnership includes over 7 years of joint activities to encourage American Indian and Alaska Native (AIAN) students to enter health professional careers. Our activities help students explore health career options, strengthen their academic skills, develop student leadership skills, develop competitive resumes and health professional school applications, and encourage students to network and seek support along their health career pathway.

We have seen the powerful impact of introducing our students to AIAN health professional role models. Our students feel the impact of the severe under-representation of AIANs in the health professional workforce in their lives on a daily basis. Many students have not seen or interacted with an AIAN health professional before participating in our events. Once students have the opportunity to see someone from a similar background or tribe describe their work and their experiences along their own health career pathway, they start to believe that perhaps they can achieve their own dreams. They begin to understand that these health professionals were once right where they are in school, and that success is possible with hard work, commitment and a willingness to seek help, guidance and support.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide inspiring stories and words from AIAN health professionals in Arizona for AIAN students interested in the health professions. We have included a wide variety of health professionals to help students see the broad range of careers available to them. We are grateful to all the AIAN health professionals who graciously donated their time and their stories for this project, despite our looming deadlines. Their excitement and willingness to participate in this project was inspiring for our team.

The idea for this booklet came from the overwhelmingly positive feedback from a booklet of Arizona health professionals that was developed several years ago by a group of faculty, staff and students at The University of Arizona. We thank them for their inspiration for this project.

We hope you enjoy the inspiring stories in this booklet, and we encourage you to share this booklet with other students who may be interested in health professions. We had such an overwhelming response to our call for AIAN health professionals to participate that we are planning to create another volume of this booklet to feature even more health professionals in Arizona. If you know of any AIAN health professionals who are interested in participating in future projects like this or who are interested in mentoring or speaking to students, please contact us.

Sincerely,

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Vanessa Jensen

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"There are obstacles in anyone's path, but there should not be any barriers."

Current Position: Surgical Resident

Health Professional Degree(s): MD

Schools Attended: Northern Arizona University (Zoology),
University of Arizona (Molecular & Cellular Biology),
University of Arizona College of Medicine

Area of Focus/Specialty: General Surgery



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I like working with my hands, and surgery allowed the opportunity to combine this with the ability to help people.

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

I like science and biology. Therefore I tried different aspects of this field, from research to nursing to teaching. I wasn't greatly inspired until my surgical rotation in medical school. This is when I learned about surgical intervention and the ability to change someone's life with one operation. I learned a surgeon is a physician who could do the most harm or the most good, and a good surgeon is someone who masters this art of helping people heal.

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

There are obstacles in anyone's path, but there should not be any barriers. The obstacles I have faced and are continuing to encounter are those that I have created for myself. To name a few, I occasionally have thoughts of incompetence or insecurity but obviously I am not. I am a high school, college, and medical school graduate. It is the simple things that I tend to overwhelm myself with; to overcome this I have to continue to have insight into myself. As far as cultural barriers, I am Navajo, so there are some cultural taboos and conflicts with becoming a surgeon. Some tribal members believe healing is through spiritual balance within one's self and any medicinal healing should be via a traditional Navajo healer only. Surgery is considered extremely taboo by some tribal members. I have consulted medicine men and most believe that traditional healing and western medicine as well the patient's ambition to get well is a team effort. The physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing should be taken into account and sometimes this healing requires multi-specialists. In keeping balanced, I continue to have blessing ceremonies to maintain this balance within myself and my family. I have overcome many obstacles, and may not have achieved so much by myself. Support from my family, extended family as well as friends continue to keep me striving for the best.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently I'm a surgical resident. I'm learning how to operate and manage patients with the guidance of attending surgeons in different surgical fields. When I'm done, in about a year, I hope to be a competent and safe surgeon with good technical abilities to serve my tribe and community.

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

Remain focused, dedicated and believe in yourself. Take all advice with caution; make informed decisions because this is your life. Make sure that you are happy with the choices you make so there are no regrets. Always look forward to the future, even when it feels dim, because there are always different ways to find your path to your goals.

Nazhone Yazzie

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"There are many programs for Native students to get involved."

Current Position: General Surgery resident

Health Professional Degree(s): MD

Schools Attended: University of Arizona

Area of Focus/Specialty: General Surgery



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I am pursuing a residency in general surgery. I actually remember wanting to become a surgeon since high school. It is the hands-on approach of this field in medicine in which you use your hands to sew, to repair, to visually see things and to fix them. Growing up in a rural area I got to use my hands to mend fences, pick pinons, shear sheep and help my dad with fixing automobiles. Part of the exposure to anatomy, the blood and guts of it all was being involved in butchering sheep, a Navajo custom. You see all those organs and wonder what each organ does and what it does for a living being. My interest in the biosciences carried through and eventually led to the interest in surgery. Helping people by operating on them is a satisfying experience in that you are visibly changing the course of disease or trauma. This is different from the other fields of medicine such as internal medicine, pediatrics, or emergency medicine. In surgery you can actually see an injury, a vessel that you can fix, a diseased gall bladder or an appendix that you can remove. Lately, I've been involved in heart surgeries, where I was opening up the chest and repairing the heart, truly a hands-on experience --that's why I enjoy it.

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

Volunteering in the hospital setting, getting to know other physicians and surgeons and shadowing them helped me to decide what I wanted to eventually pursue. Scrubbing in on operative cases during my undergraduate years also reaffirmed my decision.

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

I think the biggest obstacle was the whole application process and getting into medical school. Throughout those times I had to stay determined and not lose the belief in the dream of becoming a physician; perseverance was the ally.

What do you do in your current job?

In a surgical residency you spend five years in surgical training where you rotate in different areas of surgery. Currently I am at the Tucson Medical Center (TMC) in the community on a general surgery rotation. In a general surgery rotation, I've been involved with laparoscopic gallbladder removal, some thoracic cases such as lobectomies, and exploratory laparotomies for perforated diverticulitis.

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

I recommend that you continue your education whether or not you decide to go into medical school. It does not matter what field you're involved in right now. You don't have to major in molecular biology to go into medicine. You could be in business, sociology, or computer science and still pursue medicine. Look for opportunities to complement your resume, like research. Take those available summers between semesters and do research either close to home, within the country or even abroad. There are many programs for Native American students to get involved where you will meet people, professors, and physicians who can help you on your health career pathway.

Dena L. Wilson

Tribal Affiliation: Oglala Lakota Sioux

"My family had a hard time understanding why I had to go so far away."

Current Position: Cardiology Fellow 2nd year. University of Arizona University Medical Center

Health Professional Degree(s): MD

Schools Attended: Red Cloud Indian School, 1995
Chadron State College, 1999; University of Washington

Area of Focus/Specialty: Internal Medicine; Cardiology



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Well, my standard answer is that it kind of chose me. Growing up, my mother was a social worker, and I spent a lot of time with her at the IHS Hospital and I from then on knew I wanted to be a doctor.

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

At the age of 18, my cousin was diagnosed with Leukemia. I had just started college as a pre-med major so of course I took it upon myself to learn everything I could about the cancer and the treatment she was getting. She also made sure all those involved in her care knew of my interest in medicine which allowed me to learn even more.

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

In college, I faced a lot of racism and prejudice. I went to school in a border town, so I think the stereotypes tend to be a little worse in those areas. I faced a lot of prejudice. I really didn't have a lot of support from my advisors and mentors, so I kind of had to do things on my own. The MCAT? No clue what that was, I just knew I had to take it if I wanted to get into medical school. I kind of had to find my way into medical school by myself. I think that was a huge obstacle, but I got through that. Then, I think being away from home probably was most difficult. Many, many times I wanted to just quit. I felt like saying, "Okay, I'm done. I'm going home." My family had a hard time understanding why I had to go so far away. They still have a hard time with that to this day. That's one of the biggest obstacles I had to face, leaving my family and being away from the reservation.

What do you do in your current job?

I'm currently in my second year of cardiology fellowship training. The program is three years of additional training after internal medicine training.

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

I think that depends on the individual, but building a support system right now is probably one of the more important aspects of getting in this profession. There are so many health care careers that I wasn't aware of. I just knew about doctors and nurses and so as I learned more, I'm like "Hmm, this is interesting." I think exposing yourself to the different areas in health care and finding a mentor are things I would encourage people to do. I know it's extremely hard. Like I said in rural South Dakota, I did not have a mentor, but it helps.

Nicole Stern

Tribal Affiliation: Mescalero Apache

"Being a doctor is a life career."

Current Position: Clinical Assistant Professor of Medicine, University of Arizona, Campus Health Service

Health Professional Degree(s): MD

Schools Attended: Bachelor of Arts in History from Stanford University, 1992; Doctor of Medicine from University of Arizona College of Medicine, 1998

Area of Focus/Specialty: Internal & Sports Medicine



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

When I was in medical school, I wanted to choose a specialty that would be broad and give me opportunities to go into a sub specialty, so internal medicine was that field. One of the biggest decisions students have to make when they are in medical school is deciding on surgery or deciding on how much direct patient care is desired in one's career. After completing my Internal Medicine residency, I did a Primary Care Sports Medicine Fellowship at the University of Oklahoma. This one-year fellowship program provided me with additional training in the treatment of medical problems affecting athletes and in orthopedics.

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

Of all the experiences that led me to go into this profession, I would have to say that seeing my family on the reservation deal with the challenges of getting adequate health care and having good physicians take care of them was a big influence on my choice of profession. Seeing my relatives really struggle with misdiagnoses and not knowing if they were going to have the right care made a big impact on me when I was younger. My father is a physician, and he was positive role model for me as well. Growing up in a family with a physician is important because it impacts you and gives you a significantly different outlook on your life.

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

As far as obstacles and barriers to success, I think that probably the biggest challenge was going from high school to college. I don't think high school prepared me for my college experience. I went to college at Stanford University. It was extremely challenging getting through my initial premedical courses. In addition, it was difficult being away from home at the age 18. Also, I was trying to figure out for sure if medicine was the direction I wanted to go. As a premedical student in college, I was assigned to an American Indian medical student, called my "big sib." She was one of my mentors and helped me get through some of the tough times where I may have doubted my capabilities. She was there to give me positive encouragement, which was so critical to my success especially early on in college. She was always telling me not to let things stand in my way, even if it was just one or two college courses that I felt were really challenging. She was very supportive of me. She definitely helped me through some of the obstacles and barriers in college. To this day, we are still close friends. Once I was in medical school, there were challenges with the course work and demands on my time. When I was preparing for exams in medical school, I really needed to take extra time to prepare for them. I often met with professors and teaching assistants and worked with individuals trained in study skills, time management and exam preparation.

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Nicole Stern

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What do you do in your current job?

In my current job, I do general internal medicine and sports medicine. I see patients with a variety of problems such as the common cold, sore throats, migraine headaches, and stomach problems. I take care of a number of acute issues, meaning illnesses or health problems that patients have recently encountered. I do have a few patients whom I care for with chronic diseases such as diabetes, asthma, and high blood pressure. I also work in the urgent care clinic where I treat patients with head injuries, lacerations, shoulder dislocations, motor vehicle accidents, etc. In addition, I have worked as a volunteer team physician for the department of athletics where I covered events and games to be available in the event that athletes were injured. At Campus Health, I also take care of club sport athletes who are injured or get sick.

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

I would say that students should make sure that they know which health care career they like, because some health care careers, such as being a physician, are very demanding from initial preparation to completion. Being a doctor is a life career. A lot of preparation goes into career decision-making and so you want to be sure that you are passionate about your choice of career. Being a physician takes several years of training, especially if you want to go into a surgical or medical subspecialty. The number one thing is to make sure you want to go into a health career before you start down that path. Once you've decided on a health care career, try to spend as much time as you can figuring out if it is right for you based on shadowing experiences, research, or by talking to professionals in your chosen field to get a good idea what their career and life is like. While shadowing health care professionals or performing research, use that opportunity to make good connections with the people and hopefully, those professionals will write your letters of recommendation. I think that students should get as much experience and exposure as possible related to their chosen health career field.

Charlene R. Wood

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"Go home often wherever 'home' is."

Current Position: Program Coordinator

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Psychology, Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: Dine College (Navajo Community College) 1996, University of Arizona 2001, University of Arizona College of Medicine 2006

Area of Focus/Specialty: Family Medicine



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose a career in medicine for two reasons. One because a doctor I met stated that Native Americans would be more open to and comfortable with healthcare from a Native American physician, and I thought, "How true." Second, because I was interested in the human body and all that it does. I was aware that there were many areas in the healthcare field but saw medicine as a place to make a huge difference in the way that healthcare is delivered to our people.

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

To make sure that the field of medicine was something I really wanted to do, I shadowed a physician, volunteered in a hospital, and spent a lot of time in various summer programs. The physician I shadowed was Dr. Mary I. Johnson, a pediatric neurologist. Dr. Johnson suggested that I look at a career in medicine. Initially, I wasn't sure I wanted to pursue medicine so she took me to her office, clinics, and to the classes she taught in the UA College of Medicine. After this, I began to volunteer at a rehabilitation/ retirement facility. I thought seriously about working with people with chronic illnesses and terminal illnesses. I learned a lot and finally came to the conclusion that I wanted to pursue medicine after I spent time in a summer program called Minority Medical Education Program (MMEP, now SMDEP). The program was intense but gave me a realistic look at the time and commitment level needed for a career in medicine. Other things I did to make sure this was the career I wanted to pursue was to request that the Office of Minority Affairs (now Office of Outreach & Multicultural Affairs) put me in contact with non-traditional medical students and single parent medical students. I asked them many questions. I am a firm believer that if you are going to do something with this much commitment, you had better be prepared as best as possible and see it thorough.

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

I have faced several obstacles. First, there was the obstacle that had to do with Navajo Tradition and the fact that I would have to dissect a body. In Navajo Culture and Tradition, you are not to touch anything dead, especially a dead body. Before I left Tsaile AZ, I had a ceremony for this. The medicine man said that before things like diabetes and heart disease, all our people needed was medicine men and herbalists. He went on to say that now with these new diseases, we would need knowledge on how to combat these chronic illnesses. The second challenge I have had to face is the realization that there are many people who have a limited view of what Native Americans can and should accomplish. I have learned that I can not let their view of me stop me or limit what I am truly capable of accomplishing. A third obstacle I had to overcome was the financial aspect of funding my medical education. I received the Indian Health Service Scholarship as well as the Navajo Nation Scholarship and many more. I applied for every type of financial aid available to me. Another challenge I had was that I was a single parent for

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Charlene R. Wood

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most of my life and my son is very important to me. I worked very, very hard to keep balance in my life and give him the time he needed. There were times when my mind was saying look at all this school work I have to do but my heart, traditions, and culture said family first. The next challenge I faced was that I got married during my second year of medical school. So my family life took a new turn; I wouldn't recommend others doing this. It was tough but I have made it through. Lastly, I have learned to ask for help. There were times while in medical school that I studied so hard, I knew my diagrams and information inside and out but had a difficult time answering exam questions. I finally got a tutor. My tutor helped me to see that I knew my stuff but because I am a Circular thinker (most Native Americans are) it was difficult for me to see the 'linear' thinking of the instructor. Once I figured that out I did better on the exams.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I have applied for my medical license and I am waiting. While I'm waiting, I decided to give back to my people by traveling around my reservation and giving presentations on the importance of: *Staying in school (both high school and college); Careers available in healthcare; Transferring to a major university; Getting into medical school; and What is medical school like.* Another thing I have been doing is to help with as many summer programs as possible through the Office of Outreach & Multicultural Affairs in the UA COM. I do this because I realize the importance of giving back to my people and Native People as a whole. I decided long ago that I would do my best to be a role model and mentor to those who would like to enter into medicine.

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

Don't give up your dreams to make a difference in the healthcare field. Try to learn as much as possible about the field you are interested in. If someone says 'no' or 'you are not good enough,' they are an obstacle; go around that person and find the people you need to help you achieve your goals. Stay true to yourself and who you are as a Native Person. Learn to ask for help when you know you need it. Go home often wherever 'home' is.

John W. Molina

Tribal Affiliation: Pascua Yaqui, Tucson, AZ

"I wanted to make a difference, and it was this passion that made medicine the right profession."

Current Position: Medical Director/Assistant Director
- Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (state Medicaid Program); Founder & President of the Board for Las Fuentes Health Clinic of Guadalupe, Guadalupe, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): MD, JD

Schools Attended: JD, University of Arizona, Sandra Day O'Connor, College of Law (2005); MD, Arizona State University, College of Medicine, (1990); BA, Arizona State University (1983)

Area of Focus/Specialty: Obstetrics and Gynecology; Healthcare Administration; Indian Healthcare Law and Policy



PHYSICIAN / OB/GYN / HEALTH LAW & POLICY

Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Specifically, I was encouraged to attend medical school because a physician mentor believed I had the "spirit of healing." He also believed that my passion to help my people with sickness was my calling in life. I chose Obstetrics and Gynecology because I enjoy the surgical specialty and opportunity to provide continuity of care to my patients. Later, I decided to attend Law School again at the encouragement of mentors because I had developed a strong interest in patient advocacy and healthcare policy as it impacted the poor and underserved in our state.

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

Growing up in a small impoverished community, I personally experienced the impact of poor health and lack of access to healthcare. People were literally dying in their homes. I wanted to make a difference, and it was this passion that made medicine the right profession.

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

I did not have any family mentors, i.e., people who had gone to college, or professionals that could give me guidance in entering a professional field. Therefore, I found mentors outside my family and community that helped me along my path. Most of my close friends were also disengaged from my desires to enter the medical field; they could not see the real value of my decision to go into medicine. From their point of view, it was more about me not wanting to be part of their lifestyle, which involved just living day-to-day. I ultimately made the difficult choice to move ahead with my plans and to leave my community and friends, knowing that I would come back. I did not have a strong academic foundation; I had developed poor study habits during high school and was not very strong in the basic sciences. Therefore, I found myself having to put in extra hours, and receive tutoring in my pre-med science coursework.

What do you do in your current job?

I serve as Medical Director for our state's Medicaid program, which provides state and federal funded healthcare to people who live at 100% of the federal poverty level. In this capacity I oversee the implementation of new medical technologies and procedures for our population as well as developing medical policy for improving our healthcare system. As Assistant Director, I am in charge of

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John W. Molina

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administering our state health plan for our Native American Medicaid members. Here I ensure that our healthcare providers and hospitals are properly paid (reimbursed) for providing healthcare to our Native American population. We make sure the healthcare providers and hospitals are registered, and that special requests for procedures, or patient medical equipment, are properly authorized. As President of the Board for Las Fuentes Health Clinic of Guadalupe, a non-profit clinic that I founded in 1995 in my home town of Guadalupe, Arizona, I lead the board of directors in strategic planning and fundraising for the clinic to meet our mission or providing healthcare to the poor people of our community.

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

Health careers are all about helping people; if you genuinely have a desire to help people with their health needs, then you also have the “spirit of healing,” which will make you a success and happy in your chosen health career.

Evelyn P. Mujica-Larson

Tribal Affiliation: Nondalton Tribal Council,
Athabascan Indian

"My traditional teachings of patience, forgiveness, and humbleness have always been what I turn to."

Current Position: Behavioral Health Consultant,
Southcentral Foundation, Anchorage, Alaska

Health Professional Degree(s): Master's Degree in
Professional Counseling, Certificate in Advanced Graduate
Studies in Expressive Arts Therapies, Bachelors of Science
in Psychology

Schools Attended: Ottawa University, 2005;
Grand Canyon University, 1998

Area of Focus/Specialty: Traditional Healing, Art Therapy



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I have always been a "counselor" and especially enjoyed talks while making art. I had also sustained a spinal cord injury when I was 14, which forced my family to move out of our village and into a city. I remember how I held onto the cultural arts as my way to cope with the separation from our village and our traditions.

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

I started as a peer helper in high school. During the time I was an undergraduate college student, I volunteered at a senior center in behavioral health support. I was involved in the beginning stages of an organization that provides information on brain development in the first three years of life of infants. In addition, I completed an internship at the Carl T. Hayden VA Medical Center in the outpatient setting of the Co-Occurring Disorders clinic.

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

I am a female, Alaskan Native, Puerto Rican paraplegic, which has been an obstacle in many settings. I have had to break down stereotypes of all sorts to just get my foot in the door. I have had to work extremely hard at breaking down the stereotype of quietness as a sign of weakness. My traditional teachings of patience, forgiveness, and humbleness have always been what I turn to. These attributes have helped me to overcome the obstacles I have faced. I have always held on to the belief that if I stay positive and keep moving forward, my work will be noticed.

What do you do in your current job?

I work in a family medicine clinic providing behavioral health support. Providers are often not able to delve into the mental health barriers that may be preventing patients from benefiting from medical services. My job is to provide the mental health skills needed to get to the 'root' of the issues a patient may have. In my work, I provide brief intervention therapies and techniques for the patient. Then I will brief the medical provider on what course of action has been taken, or that I feel needs to be taken, to ensure mental and physical wellness.

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

Address any mental health issues that you feel get in the way of your success. If in Western settings you feel uncomfortable, work with Traditional Healers, elders, or family to help deal with the emotional impact these settings have on you. Western teachings are not familiar to us, but recognizing that these feelings of discomfort are normal, and that you need to have a healthy way to release those pent up emotions.

Victoria Steele

Tribal Affiliation: Seneca-Mingo

"I can't think of a better way down an honorable path than that of a Healer."

Current Position: Counselor in Private Practice

Health Professional Degree(s): Master's Degree in Counseling, Bachelor's Degree in Counseling Psychology

Schools Attended: University of Phoenix 2003, Prescott College 2000

Area of Focus/Specialty: Native American counseling, spirituality, couples and individuals



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I think I knew as a child that my path was that of helping people understand themselves and others, and to heal their emotional and spiritual wounds.

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

I have received messages and guidance in dreams and signs in Nature that reassure and confirm that I am on the right path.

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

The most difficult obstacle that I have had to overcome would be other's perceptions that I don't fit the Hollywood stereotype of what they think an "Indian" should be. Sometimes there is pressure to prove myself. Ultimately though, it's not what others think; it is more about me being true to my Medicine, my Path.

What do you do in your current job?

I'm a counselor in private practice with a specialty in Native American and Nature counseling. I see adults in individual, couples, and group therapy. I especially enjoy doing couples and relationship therapy.

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

I can't think of a better way down an honorable path than that of a Healer. If this is your path, then do yourself a favor and follow it.

Lessina Dele

Tribal Affiliation: Dine

"Explore your options."

Current Position: Pharmacist Phoenix Indian Medical Center, Phoenix, AZ & Safeway Pharmacist, Glendale, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Doctor of Pharmacy

Schools Attended: University of Arizona– pre-pharmacy, Midwestern University College of Pharmacy, 2004

Area of Focus/Specialty: Pharmacist



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

My aunt is diabetic and to support her I used to go with her to some of her appointments. It was a great learning experience to see pharmacists in a patient-pharmacist relationship and so I wanted to learn more about the profession. I knew I wanted a career in the medical field and this experience directed me a little more into pharmacy.

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

In high school, I volunteered my junior and senior year at the pharmacy in Tuba City, and when I was away at college, I'd come home and work at the pharmacy every summer. In Tucson, I worked at Tucson Medical Center as a technician. These experiences allowed me to see the profession in two different environments. I found that I enjoyed what the job entailed and I knew it was something I could see myself doing. I spent a summer while in high school, at the University of Arizona Med-Start Program which was great in helping me narrow my focus on pharmacy.

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

In my path, on my way to becoming a pharmacist, barriers included time management and time with my family. As a single mom, I had to balance school/work and my daughter. Learning how to manage my time was a huge obstacle as I learned to create and follow a schedule. I would spend time with family during the day and study in the evening. The classes involved in attaining a PharmD had a lot of science and math. I found that working in study groups, going to a professor's office hours, and tutors helped me. The resources are available but it's up to the individual to seek them out.

What do you do in your current job?

I'm a staff pharmacist. I work in an outpatient setting which is more like retail pharmacy. This facility has an in-patient and out-patient area. I haven't been trained to handle in-patient, because my previous experience was in retail; eventually I'll be doing in-patient pharmacy work, which is something I am looking forward to doing. We fill prescriptions, provide medication information to the patients and providers, and we monitor patients compliance of their medications.

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

There are a lot of different fields in healthcare and I suggest exploring the options before you decide on a career/profession. I suggest getting hands on experience while in high school or in college, then you can direct yourself. I mention this only because I met a lot of people, even in pharmacy school, who did not have any experience in pharmacy and felt that the profession was not for them. Most finished pharmacy school, and went on to further their education in medicine or other professions. Explore your options because there are different avenues and a lot of resources, especially for American Indian students for scholarships or fellowships. They should start looking into that ahead of time. Physically get involved with it, even if it's just volunteering, so then you know where you want to go and what you want to do.

Charisse Lindsey Holiday

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"Take advantage of opportunities that will allow you to grow as a student and become a future professional."

Current Position: Registered Dietitian & Diabetes Educator; Phoenix Area, Arizona

Health Professional Degree(s): BS in Dietetics, MS in Human Nutrition

Schools Attended: Arizona State University 2000-2005

Area of Focus/Specialty: Diabetes, Adult Weight Management



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose my profession because I believe how we eat and what we eat influences our health and well being.

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

I did an internship at a diabetes program and discovered the major impact of diet, care/management, and prevention on diabetes. Completing a dietetic internship and understanding the importance of nutrition in all aspects of recovery, disease management, disease prevention, etc. was how I made sure that this profession was a good fit for me.

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

Obstacles include having to consider financial restrictions, environmental limitations, dietary and physical activity patterns, and the social health of individuals/families in order to provide effective education and counseling that influences lasting behavior change which is also acceptable and meets the needs of the patient and their family. I think considering the stages of behavior change helped me identify where my patients stand and how I can help one move into the action stage of change, rather than intimidating my patient to making major lifestyle changes in an instant. In addition to the stages of change, networking with other health professionals who are experts in medicine, pharmacy, behavioral health, exercise, etc. has helped me overcome barriers.

What do you do in your current job?

I provide diabetes education, weight management education/counseling, and medical nutrition therapy in individual and group based settings.

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

Take advantage of opportunities that will allow you to grow as a student and become a future professional.

REGISTERED DIETITIAN

Georgia Tsingine

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo/Hopi

"It's good to actually spend time on a day to day basis with somebody whom you think has an interesting job."

Current Position: Family Practice Physician

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

Schools Attended: Arizona State University 1996,
University of Arizona Master of Public Health, 1999;
University of Arizona College of Medicine, 2003

Area of Focus/Specialty: Primary Care



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

It was a late decision; I decided when I was a junior in college. Actually the Minority Affairs Office at the University of Arizona College of Medicine introduced me to medicine. Until then, I didn't think of it as a career. So they kind of exposed me to the idea of a health care career. Eventually, I decided to pursue medicine and to go on to become a physician.

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

Arizona State University has a pre-med program which is an internship that takes place during the summer. In this program you actually work in the emergency departments. You are exposed to the health profession from that aspect. I also attended the Minority Medical Education Program (MMEP) at the University of Arizona, both experiences actually encouraged me to choose to go into medicine.

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

Becoming a physician actually takes a long time. For me, it took a total of 15 years. One obstacle I had was keeping focused on my goals. You have to remain focused and believe that you are going to finish medical school and earn your medical degree. Another obstacle was being away from my family. I had to move to Tucson from Phoenix and I had to live by myself which was an obstacle for me because I had no family nearby. The greatest obstacle I faced was that I was the only Native American in my undergraduate classes and while I worked at getting my masters degree. This was also the case when I went into medicine. So that was sometimes difficult, but I had support from the University of Arizona due to the Minority Affairs program. I was exposed to Native American medical students even though some of them were two or three years ahead me. I was able to interact with them.

What do you do in your current job?

In my current job, I am a Family Practice physician at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC). I work in primary care, mostly in adult medicine, but I see adolescents from the age of 15 and up. I provide primary care for all the patients here. I also work in a procedural clinic and a colposcopy clinic.

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

I would encourage them to actually seek experiences in the different health care related fields. I encourage this because you always have this image or perception of what it's going to be like, but you don't really know what it's like until you see it and live it. It's good to actually spend time on a day to day basis with somebody whom you think has an interesting job. Personally, I've actually never spent any time with a physician until I was a senior in college. It's difficult to get this type of experience. Talk with people who are in training to become a physician like medical students, residents, and people out in the community and actually see what they do in medicine. For me, going into medicine actually opened up many different

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Georgia Tsingine

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avenues, and you can actually create your own career if you want to. A large portion of medicine is being committed to your goal, because it does take a commitment, and in this day and economic time, you have to be very, very committed to medicine to endure all the work and put up with everything else that they don't teach you about in medical school or in residency. While in school you learn about things such as finances and health care funding. There are more things that you learn only while you are at your job.

PHYSICIAN / FAMILY PRACTICE

Charlotte Fafard

Tribal Affiliation: Gila River Pima

"It is our responsibility to take care of our children and our elders."

Current Position: Case Management Supervisor, Phoenix Indian Medical Center; Indian Health Service, Commander in the Public Health Service

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

Schools Attended: University of Arizona, 1989; University of Washington, 1996

Area of Focus/Specialty: Master's program focused on Healthcare Systems Management.



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I knew from the time that I was 4 or 5 that I wanted to be a nurse. My mother was attending nursing school and I knew that I would too.

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

I used to volunteer at Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC) where my mother worked. I volunteered during summer breaks when I was 12-13 years old and when I was 17-18 years old. I started working in a nursing home as a Nursing Assistant to get more experience with patient care when I was around 19-20 years old. Being around patient care areas early on helped me to see the many dynamic parts in the nursing profession. I learned to work as a team member early on in my adulthood through the volunteer and nursing home work experiences. I also had many older relatives with chronic diseases, like diabetes, which required ongoing healthcare maintenance. Through them, I learned the importance of strong disease care management and how it can improve the quality of life when care is taken to manage the illnesses or injuries closely. I saw and continue to see, daily, what happens when disease care management is not strong.

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

You can't allow your thoughts to tell you there are 'barriers' or 'obstacles', otherwise, you may tend to focus on your thoughts and who knows, you may find more problems. I've viewed my life experiences as events, situations, and experiences that require certain actions on my part to reach my goal. When a challenging situation takes place, I determine what I have control over in particular, and then focus on what needs to be done. Such things as time, physical/mental/emotional/spiritual energy, family, and other people can pull you down, if you allow, to places in thought that are not productive, nor worthwhile. The Creator has a purpose for all on this earth and with this knowledge and assurance I have always had the comfort to continue through the challenge (barrier or obstacle), knowing that the Creator will guide me where I need to be; the key is to allow this to happen. While I was away at college, I missed my family at home on the reservation. I missed out on many of the daily happenings that continued while I was away. The challenge of being away from my reservation and away from family made me even more determined to do well and finish school as soon as I could so that I could go back home. I also learned about the local tribes and got involved with community activities, which also felt like being home.

What do you do in your current job?

I am the department supervisor for the Case Management Department. I supervise 5 Registered Nurses, 1 secretary, 1 Medical Support Assistant, 1 Patient Registration Supervisor, 8 Benefit Coordinators and

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Charlotte Fafard

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about 40 Contact Representatives. We are responsible for helping patients along the continuum of care focusing on: care coordination, alternate resources (Medicare, Medicaid and Private Insurance), identification and management, cost containment, and patient and provider advocacy. I also serve as an ad-hoc member of the PIMC Executive Management team, which allows me to participate in matters pertaining to the medical center and the urban and tribal communities we serve. I support the CEO Management team in providing input as to: how people access care, how care is paid for, who pays for care, and how we can design our systems to provide care to as many people with the available resources we have.

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

Stick with your program!! We have such a tremendous need for AI/AN people to provide the care and healing to those who need our help. It is our responsibility to take care of our children and our elders. This is what has allowed us to survive for the many thousands of years. Our AI/AN ill and injured respond so much better to culturally appropriate care. YOU are the one who can provide this service with the gifts and talents laid before you. There are many options especially with all the advances in technology. The variety of healthcare careers available gives you the freedom to find something that you enjoy and that your community needs.

Adrienne Burnette-Frazier

Tribal Affiliation: White Mountain Apache Tribe

"My parents were very influential."

Current Position: Laboratory Manager, Indian Health Service, Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC)

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Microbiology, Masters in Health Administration

Schools Attended: Northern Arizona University, 1991; University of Phoenix, 2007

Area of Focus/Specialty: Pathology/Clinical Laboratory



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Since high school, I was encouraged by my parents to take all the offered math and science courses. I was encouraged pretty much to stay away from anything extracurricular. My parents were very influential. For some reason my parents influenced me to take math and science courses throughout high school. Thanks to them I think I placed pretty high in math. This idea carried over to college. At college, I took my parents' advice and took as many math and science courses possible. I started with a degree in microbiology, but eventually I started searching for a major. I found that I liked medical microbiology, so I geared my studies in that direction. I started with math and ended up in microbiology.

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

One of the things I did to make sure this profession was right for me was I took part in a program called the Minority Biomedical Research Support Program (MBRS) at Northern Arizona University. I applied for a job through the program and became a research aide to one of the professors who was doing a study on infectious diseases which are prevalent on the Navajo Reservation. I did antimicrobial research and he allowed me to do my own research as well. I actually have published research material in my name. I have presented the information at the national conferences while I was in college. So that was one of the things that I did to make sure that this is what I wanted to do as a health career. I don't know if MBRS is still available, but participating in a similar program would help. I also started volunteering at the Indian Hospital in Whiteriver AZ; that was where I was taught how to draw blood and do urine dip sticks. Volunteer experience is important. Take advantage of programs that are offered at universities.

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

One of the obstacles that I've encountered was trying to find the correct career path. How did I overcome finding a career path? By looking into various fields. I had many different jobs. I worked for the American Red Cross, and Missouri Analytical Laboratories, which did research on antibiotics, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency. I finally settled on the Indian Health Service because of all it had to offer. I think the most recent obstacle, while in my field as a lab manager, is the shortage of medical technologists. As a lab manager, I need medical technologists in the laboratories at Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC). To overcome this obstacle, I've been meeting with delegates at ASU and Arizona schools to bring Native American MLT students, medical technician students, and high school students into our laboratories to see what we are doing in the hopes that we will recruit more people into our medical laboratories. We've also increased salary offers. Hopefully this will be successful. I think that about 20% of the medical technicians right now are close to retirement. When they do retire we will need even more medical technologists. In that sense, I'm doing what I can to bring Native American

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Adrienne Burnette-Frazier

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students into our laboratories to work and observe the laboratory through externships in the hopes they will stay.

What do you do in your current job?

I'm the Laboratory Manager. Currently, I oversee the microbiology department, hematology department, chemistry department, and histology & scientology department. In addition, I supervise medical technologists in these departments. I try to make sure we are fully staffed, and that the work flows. In addition, I figure out work shift coverage and how to keep costs within the budget of the lab.

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

My advice to Native American students who are interested in health careers is to volunteer at an Indian hospital in whatever profession interests you. Also do the same thing I did; if there are programs at your university where you can do research try it - it will give you a look inside different health careers.

Leonard Lopez

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"For the young ones who want to go into the health care field, doing well in high school is very important."

Current Position: Environmental Health & Safety

Health Professional Degree(s): Master's in Business Administration (MBA)

Schools Attended: Brigham Young University/ New Mexico Highlands University

Area of Focus/Specialty: Health & Safety



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

My present job chose me. I worked at Williams Co. for 25 years as a safety officer for a group of staff members but was laid off. Since that time, I was hired by the Indian Health Service as a safety officer; I have been here for 5 years now. My job as a safety officer encompasses safety in so many areas within the health care environment.

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

My previous occupation dealt with safety in the work environment for staff. In this job, I've learned more about environmental safety as it relates to staff as well as patients. Environmental safety with relation to the healthcare field requires that I follow guidelines that require me to be more proficient and professional from a safety stand point. This means that in addition to working with staff and patients, safety is involved in the facility structures, the grounds, and the equipment people work with, the ergonomics while on the job, and dealing with hazardous materials, etc.

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

I understood about general safety from my previous jobs; however the healthcare field was new to me. There are more people with individual safety needs and appropriately meeting those needs is probably the biggest challenge I can think of so far. Since I work well with people in general and I am a self-motivated learner, I learned the ropes of running the safety program for the healthcare center. It was a sharp, steep learning curve for me. So I just had to plunge into it and just learn it. I made myself learn it.

What do you do in your current job?

Again, it encompasses so many things. I deal with emergency preparedness, safety issues, security issues, the handling and storage of hazardous materials, and the disposing of chemicals. My job is to make sure the "Right to Know" rule is in place for everyone. In addition, I am responsible for making sure the safety policy for each department is followed, from a staff point of view with the national patient safety goals in mind.

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

I believe that if they are very interested at the high school level that is the time to really apply themselves in reading, writing, and in scientific classes. For the young ones who want to go into the health care field, doing well in high school is very important. In addition, I also think it's important to be a people person.

Diana DeLaTorre

Tribal Affiliation: Yavapai/Apache Nation

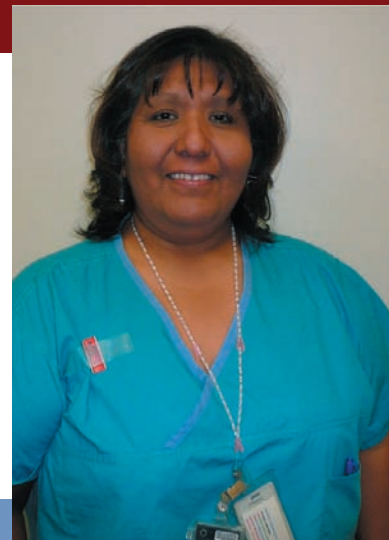
"You can make a difference in someone's life and in their health."

Current Position: Radiology Technician/Mammographer

Health Professional Degree(s): (License) American Registry of Radiologic Technologist (ARRT)

Schools Attended: Northern Arizona University (NAU)
– 1977, 2 year program

Area of Focus/Specialty: Radiology/Mammography



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I knew when I was in the seventh grade what I wanted to do. I just happened to see a TV show about X-Rays and it caught my interest, so I asked my mother about the field of radiology since she worked in the medical field as a nurse. She explained what little she knew and what work she saw her co-workers do. I knew what I was going to do and I knew where I wanted to go to school. I knew that there was a program at NAU. This was what I had always wanted to do.

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

Like I said, I just knew what I wanted to do even before I was accepted into the program at NAU. Not everybody knows what they want to do for a career. Some people don't decide until later on. By talking with people in the field, and going on career field trips to visit the hospital I learned about healthcare careers. We always toured the radiology department and talked with any staff members available. This was how I learned that there were many different modalities in the field of radiology.

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

I don't really think I had any. There were a lot of good people where I worked. I think the most challenging aspect was stepping into a large classroom, but I soon overcame this when I started to meet others who had the same interest in the radiology field. I came from a small town with a small school, and suddenly I was faced with walking around a large university campus. There are so many different people, but once I was into the radiology program, I was always with the same group of people in all my classes. In the program, you get to know each as you spend your two years with each other. You become very close whether you live together, or you work together. I would have to add that having a lot of support from my family kept me going through the years as I worked on reaching my goal.

What do you do in your current job?

In my current job, I do at least 90 percent of the mammograms here at Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC). There are many other things that I do in the mammogram office besides exams. My job requires that I keep abreast of the changes that are made through the FDA and ACR. In addition, there are yearly inspections by the FDA which include being accredited by the ACR every three years. I've been doing mammograms for about 17 years out of my 30 year career. I was cross trained to get mammograms because one of my supervisors told me, "You are going to learn how to do mammograms." I said "okay." This wasn't really what I wanted to do. I really wanted to do CT (Computed Tomography) or ultrasound.

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

It doesn't matter what kind of career you pick just show an interest and you can make a difference in someone's life and in their health. Believe in yourself and others will believe in you and your abilities as a person. One of the things I tell my children is, "You can do anything you want. You can choose anything you want to be." But whatever you do, do it to the best of your abilities and you will be the person that everyone comes to when they need the job done right.

Al Peyketewa

Tribal Affiliation: Zuni

"It takes a special person to care for a patient."

Current Position: Lieutenant Commander, U.S. PHS
Clinical Chemistry Supervisor, PIMC, Phoenix, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in
Clinical Laboratory Science

Schools Attended: University of New Mexico, 1998

Area of Focus/Specialty: Laboratory Manager



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose my career based on my experience as a child and what my family was faced with at the time I was entering college. As I child I remember seeing two men outside the hospital wearing white Navy uniforms. I asked my mother, who they were? She told me they were doctors and they are the ones who make people feel better when they are sick. I wanted the same ability to help people feel better when they felt sick.

When I finished high school and was entering college, my family suffered a loss when my great-grand mother passed away. At that time, there was not a full understanding of her ailment. This made my passion stronger to pursue a career in the health care field to try and understand what caused her death. I figured if I can educate myself in medicine, I could help my family in understanding what had happened and bring closure. Not only would I be helping my family but I would also be there for all the other Native American families who need assistance in understanding what ails them.

I started college at the University of New Mexico, Gallup Branch. At that time there were basically only two health profession programs that interested me. I was either going to be a Nurse or a Medical Laboratory Technician. I chose the Medical Laboratory Technician program because I felt that provided a more in-depth, analytical based knowledge of how the body works.

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

I participated in a summer job program while I was in college that placed students in hospitals and clinics to experience what it was like to work among different health care professions. One summer, I worked as a certified nursing assistant (CNA) and this gave me insight to what a nurse does. During another summer I worked in a hospital laboratory that provided patient interaction and the analytical stimuli, which struck my interest a lot. The laboratory provided a comprehensive view of each patient with the laboratory results generated from testing patient specimens. This definitely was the best way to understand what was going on with a patient physiologically. This pretty much solidified my decision on becoming a Medical Technologist.

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

One obstacle that I had to overcome, and I'm sure most other students will have, is the financial need that came with attending college. When I started college, I was eligible for a tribal scholarship and a federal grant. With these I managed to cover the cost of tuition, books and fees. That left the hardship of trying to cover the cost of commuting over 80 miles round trip to and from school, and the cost of everyday life such as meals and other incidentals. I still remember the times when my mother and I shared meals from home in between classes because we could not afford to buy food at school.

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What do you do in your current job?

I am a Commissioned Corps Officer with the U. S. Public Health Service, stationed at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC). I'm the Clinical Chemistry Supervisor overseeing the sections of chemistry, urinalysis, serology, and molecular diagnostic testing. As the supervisor, I manage the operation of the department covering patient specimen testing, quality control, quality assurance, and staffing. I'm involved in recruitment of Medical Technologists, the training of new employees, and the implementing of new policies and procedures when necessary. Above all, my main responsibility is to provide the most accurate, reliable laboratory results for patient diagnosis.

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

I would commend them for their interest in a health career because it takes a special person to care for a patient. If they see themselves as caregivers and have a strong passion to help others, do it. We need all the help we can get to care for each other.

Rinda L. Hathcoat

Tribal Affiliation: Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

"It's a great opportunity to serve our people."

Current Position: Associate Director (acting), Patient Financial Services, Administrative Services

Health Professional Degree(s): Registered Health Information Administrator (RHIA), Masters in Business Administration (MBA) Health Care Management

Schools Attended: Haskell Junior College, 1978; University of Kansas, 1981; University of Phoenix, 2003

Area of Focus/Specialty: Health Care Administration



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

In high school, I attended a three week health careers workshop at Middle Tennessee State University. This program gave me exposure to various health care disciplines. I wasn't interested in direct patient care so I opted for a degree in Medical Records Administration.

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

During the summer months while in high school I worked in the Cherokee Indian Hospital in Cherokee, North Carolina and the Health Management Office for the tribe. Also, the Medical Records Program I attended at the University of Kansas covered many areas (Utilization Review, Quality Management, Coding, etc.) As a result of this program, I was able to work in various disciplines over the years, which gave me sound working knowledge of many areas of health care management.

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

The greatest obstacle I faced was "culture shock" when I graduated from Haskell Indian Junior College and started my junior year at the University of Kansas. Having grown up on the reservation and immediately going to Haskell right out of high school, I wasn't comfortable in a large university setting. I got through the program with assistance from many mentors along the way. One very special lady took me under her wing while I was in the Medical Records Program at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City, Kansas.

What do you do in your current job?

I'm the Associate Director (acting) over several departments such as: Contract Health Service, 3rd Party Billing, Finance, Engineering, Health Records, Managed Care, Case Management, Materials Management, Acquisitions, and Support Services at the Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC).

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

You will always have a job. People continue to need health care services and whatever career path you choose whether it is direct patient care or administrative work; it's a great opportunity to serve our people.

Pauletta Chief

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"We need more Native American medical and health professionals because of the intercultural connection."

Current Position: Nutritionist, Navajo Nation WIC Program, Tuba City, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Nutritional Science

Schools Attended: Northern Arizona University, 2000

Area of Focus/Specialty: Community Nutrition



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose this profession because of the high prevalence of diabetes among Native Americans.

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

One experience was shadowing under a nutritionist in regards to the clinic flow and management of the local WIC clinic. The second experience had to do with teaching nutrition to elementary students while I was a Junior and later a Senior in college.

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

The chemistry courses were difficult. I found that chemistry courses were intense and required a lot of diligence and focus. To increase my understanding of chemistry concepts and principles, I attended group study sessions with fellow Nutrition Science students and met with the Professor regarding areas for improvement.

What do you do in your current job?

In my current job, I conduct nutrition counseling for high-risk populations among women, infants, and children. These clients are considered high risk if they have one or more of the following conditions: anemia, high blood pressure, obesity, or diabetes among many other nutritional risks. Infants and children who are underweight, premature or low birth weight are also considered high-risk. In addition, I manage two local WIC clinics, one in Tuba City, AZ and one in Kayenta, AZ.

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

Working as a Nutritionist within my native community, I am definitely aware of the shortage of health professionals on the reservation. I feel we need more Native American medical and health professionals because of the intercultural connection. Natives tend to have a greater capability of communicating and understanding Native patients when providing treatment needed for those suffering from preventive diseases such as diabetes. This close connection between the health professional and the patient often inspires the patient to take small steps toward healthy behavioral changes. I have experienced this cultural connection with my own clientele in my area of work.

Victoria Matt

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"Isn't it about time we take care of our own?"

Current Position: Orthopedic Surgeon/Medical Officer at Fort Defiance Indian Hospital/PHS/IHS

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

Schools Attended: University of Arizona, 1991, B.S.; Harvard University, 1993, MS; Tufts University School of Medicine, 1997, MD; Orthopedic Residency (1997-2002): UNM School of Medicine, ABQ, NM; Foot and Ankle Fellowship (2002-03): Baylor College of Med., Houston, TX; Orthopedic Trauma Fellowship (2004-05): UNM School of Med, ABQ, NM

Area of Focus/Specialty: Orthopedic Surgery/ Orthopedic Trauma & Foot and Ankle



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Orthopedics is a fun surgical specialty that involves fixing and getting people back to physical function. It is the only specialty I liked at the end of all my clinical rotations.

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

After I found orthopedics as a specialty of interest, I selected orthopedics as the first elective rotation in my 4th year of medical school and took call often as a medical student so that I could experience everything about the specialty. Despite its long hours at work (now they have 80 hours limit per week, but during my time, they didn't have hour limits per week) and a very busy operative on-call schedule (somebody's got to fix those broken bones), I still enjoyed it.

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

Barriers and obstacles are many, but to list a few: 1) Pre-college academic preparation was poor. I had to work extra hard to catch up and studied many hours to keep decent grades in college. I learned how to take standardized examinations while going through college. 2) My family didn't have money, so I applied for grants & scholarships and worked to support myself during school and pay for tuition etc. 3) Not many women in orthopedics surgery so when I decided to apply, I had several male surgeons trying to persuade me not to apply because I may not be able to physically handle the job. I worked mostly with men in orthopedics residency as well as my current and previous jobs in orthopedics. Unfortunately, since the beginning of orthopedic training and up to my last job, I have worked with some unpleasant men and experienced very unprofessional conduct by men at meetings/presentations and in the general work environment; in other professions, people get fired for such conduct.

What do you do in your current job?

In my current job, I am an Orthopedic Surgeon at Fort Defiance Indian Hospital. As such, I provide clinical and surgical care pertaining to musculoskeletal injuries and pathology.

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

If you apply yourself and commit to hard work and time to achieve, the opportunities are endless. It takes some creativity in obtaining funds to go to school and live. It is in the end, a rewarding achievement, which is the opportunity to return home to work with the community you know and have lived in, and doing a job that mostly non-Natives have been doing for many years in our communities. Isn't it about time we take care of our own?

Karen Chief-Onesalt

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"Native youth need to be motivated by exploring what opportunities are available for them."

Current Position: Supervisory Respiratory Therapist,
Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC) Phoenix, AZ

Health Professional Degree(s): Respiratory Therapy

Schools Attended: Long Technical Institute

Area of Focus/Specialty: Respiratory Therapy



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

As a child, I wanted to be a nurse, but after volunteering at a local hospital I lost interest in nursing. On career day during my senior year in 1985, various schools came to my high school. One particular school talked about respiratory therapy which interested me, because it was diverse in that you treated patients of all ages.

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

I changed my career choice as a result of my experience as a volunteer at a local hospital, where I actually saw what the duties of nurses and doctors were on a day to day basis. So, I suppose my experience of volunteering at a hospital helped me to decide.

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

The major obstacle that I encountered was lack of finances. I came from a family with many financial challenges; therefore my parents were not able to assist me financially. I received a Pell Grant and got a student loan to pay for school.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a respiratory therapist. I work with patients of all ages and in many different care settings. Respiratory Therapists are members of the health care team that provide respiratory care for patients with heart and lung disorders. Most Respiratory therapists work in hospitals where they perform intensive care, critical care, and neonatal procedures. They are also typically a vital part of the hospital's lifesaving response team that handles patient emergencies. Respiratory therapists perform procedures that are both diagnostic and therapeutic. Some of these activities include: Obtaining and analyzing sputum and breath specimens; obtain blood specimens and analyze them to determine levels of oxygen, carbon dioxide, and other gases and interpreting the data obtained from the specimens; measuring the capacity of lung function; studying disorders of people with disruptive sleep patterns; operating and maintaining various types of highly sophisticated equipment to administer oxygen or assist with breathing; monitoring and managing therapy that will help a patient recover lung function; administer medications in aerosol form to help alleviate breathing problems; maintaining a patient's artificial airway, one that may be in place to help the patient breathe who can't through normal means; and conducting smoking cessation programs.

What advice do you have for American Indian/Alaska Native students who are interested in health careers? My advice is young people need to explore the many health care career opportunities there are today. I was not aware of any opportunities other than my volunteer experience, which was not around the Native patient population. Now, there are a lot of native programs coupled with volunteer experiences. Here at Phoenix Indian Medical Center, for instance we have the Hoop of Learning Program. This program allows students to observe the various healthcare professionals in the hospital. Native youth need to be motivated by exploring what opportunities are available for them.

Kevin L. Hogan

Tribal Affiliation: Rosebud Sioux Tribe

"You can do anything you want, but you've got to have determination and effort."

Current Position: Chief of Housekeeping

Health Professional Degree(s): Business Administration

Schools Attended: University of Albuquerque, 1985

Area of Focus/Specialty: Finance, Accounting, Economics, Business Law



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I choose Business Administration as a path to want to become a CEO for one of the Indian Health Service hospitals. My mom was an administrator. She worked her way up from supply all the way up to administrator officer for the Rosebud Service Unit in Rosebud, South Dakota.

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

My first twelve years in the federal government with Indian Health Service was within finance. I was an accounting technician after graduating from college. I was promoted to an accountant, and then promoted to supervisor operating accountant, and on to budgeting officer or finance officer. So my path was mainly in finance, but it exposed me to service units doing audits and so forth.

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

The only obstacles I encountered were just getting my grasp on bureaucratic obstacles such as learning how to work within a system, and knowing the rules and regulations, of course there's a lot in the government. Once you mastered that, the sky's the limit, you can do anything you want, but you've got to have determination and effort.

What do you do in your current job?

Right now, I'm with Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC) and I'm their Chief of Housekeeping. We are the backbone of the infection control for the hospital.

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

Just have the will to succeed. You got to put forth the effort to succeed.

Callie Baker

Tribal Affiliation: 3 Affiliated Tribes, North Dakota

"You will struggle at times, but it's still all worth it in the end."

Current Position: RN, Phoenix Indian Medical Center

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor in Nursing, Minor Psychology, Health Education

Schools Attended: Fort Berthold Community College – North Dakota, University of North Dakota – Grand Forks, 2003

Area of Focus/Specialty: Medicine, Surgery, Pediatrics



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I choose nursing because I like helping people. There was a big shortage of nurses in North Dakota at the time, and there still is. In general, there is a shortage of nurses. I also wanted a job where I could always be learning. Nursing has so many different roads you can take.

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

I had to make sure I was able to talk to people and that I was able to relate to people. This means being able to get along with people. I made sure I liked this, and I do.

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

An obstacle for me is being a new young nurse working with and alongside the older nurses. Older nurses do things differently. The older nurses coming in are dealing with new nurses and the changes they bring. Health care is changing every day. It is hard because if you do something that you have been taught that is new, you got to make sure you don't step on anybody's toes or offend them. New nurses don't want to create friction, but it happens every day, you just have to learn how to deal with this. That's probably the biggest problem with me is being young and moving up the ladder.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a pediatrics nurse; in addition, I work on the Med/Surge floor.

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

Keep trying!! Don't stop. You can get caught up in a lot of stuff, but it's so worth it. Health careers help you. You will struggle at times, but it's still all worth it in the end.

Ron West

Tribal Affiliation: White Mountain Apache

"The Native American people need more professionals rather than just Native American studies majors."

Current Position: Deputy Chief of Physical Therapy, PIMC

Health Professional Degree(s): BS in Spanish, Masters of Science in Physical Therapy, Doctorate in Physical Therapy

Schools Attended: University of Miami, MSPT 1996; A.T. Still University, DPT 2004

Area of Focus/Specialty: Physical Therapy



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

The reason I chose my specific career had to do with a challenge I faced. I was a gymnast when I was younger but I suffered an injury and I had to do physical therapy. I found each rehabilitation visit very painful. I decided I could do it much better and with more compassion. This is the reason I started pursuing a career in physical therapy.

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

There were a lot of obstacles on my pathway to physical therapy. I would have to say the obstacles were academic, financial, and the delivery of misinformation about physical therapy. My college was paid for by an athletic scholarship because I was a gymnast. When I went to college, I didn't know what to study or what to do initially. But I knew that I really wanted to be a physical therapist. So, I saw a counselor and asked about it. The counselors at my school counseled me into thinking that there was no way I could be a physical therapist because my grades were not good enough. However, I started calling and mailing different physical therapy programs for information about their programs. I found that I could graduate with any major as long as I had the necessary prerequisites. I began to apply to PT schools just before graduating from college. The first year I applied I didn't get accepted. I called for feedback. I was told that I didn't have experience and that although my overall grades were not good, I had great science grades. So I got a job as a physical therapy technician/aide and worked in a physical therapy clinic. I loved it and I was able to experience the hospital and outpatient setting. I applied again the following year and was eventually accepted by the University of Miami after being placed on the alternate list. A co-worker, told me about the IHS scholarship program. About a week before school started in May I received a call from the University of Miami saying, "We just had another cancellation, we have an opening, do you want to take it?" I said "Yes!" I loaded up the truck and moved to Miami. Once there I learned that the IHS scholarship program didn't start until August so I had to pay for that whole summer's tuition. The University of Miami is a private institution so it cost ten thousand dollars just for that summer's tuition; I received a student loan for this. So I was very thankful to get the IHS scholarship to pay for all of my school. It was wonderful and such a blessing to make it through the program. So those are a couple of experiences that helped me become a physical therapist. Initially, I think it was my sports activity that really drew me to physical therapy. However, physical therapy is not just about sports. It is working with sick and injured people as well as the geriatric population.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a physical therapist and the Deputy Chief of Physical Therapy here at Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC). PIMC is the largest Indian Health Service hospital in the United States. Unfortunately though we are the largest hospital, we have almost the smallest staff when it comes to hospitals. There are I believe

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36 IHS hospitals in the US. Of those there are smaller and larger hospitals. Of the larger hospitals, we have the least amount of staff. Tuba City, Gallup, Shiprock, and Ft. Defiance have more physical therapists than we do. We probably see three times as many patients as they do. It is a unique situation.

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

I think that number one they need to graduate from high school. I say go right into college and don't waste time. Community Colleges in Arizona are great. They don't have to start studying health care immediately while in college because they need to explore different avenues. Students need to find out what they want to do then they can make better decisions. A lot of Native American kids are pushed into Native American study programs. That is going to lead them into maybe a teaching career if they continue to get their doctorate. But I think Native American students should be studying more science, law, or medicine. These students can take those Native American study classes but my hope is that those classes don't become their only focus. The Native American people need more professionals rather than just Native American studies majors.

Marsh Fairey

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"I wanted my career to be of positive things."

Current Position: Biomedical Engineering Supervisor

Health Professional Degree(s): BS in Electronic Engineering

Schools Attended: DeVry, 1985

Area of Focus/Specialty: Medical Equipment Network Systems



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

When I graduated with an electronic engineering degree, a lot of my graduating classmates were getting jobs with major industrial corporations that have large contracts with the government and the military to build missiles and things of that sort. I didn't feel that I needed to do that. I wanted my career to be of positive things. I found out that the health care industry had a profession in the biomedical engineering field; that's why I chose to go into health care.

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

To get into this profession, I had to start at the very basic ground level, meaning that even though I had an engineering degree, I had to start as a technician and progress from level one through three. Then as an introductory engineer, I progressively advanced from level one, to two, and then three. The engineering was more of a challenge. The job/training at that time was in a private sector hospital. I was given more responsibility over certain departments as I gained more experience. I gained more responsibility in the health care field through the operating room. This involved general surgery, cardiovascular surgery, neurological surgery and other sensitive types of surgery processors that relate to medical equipment.

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

An obstacle for me was at the level of status co-technician. I knew I wanted to stay in the field because I like a variety of challenges of all kinds. I guess some people enjoy trouble shooting, or repetitious work but I didn't. I think that the technician field was probably the biggest obstacle that I had to overcome. As I worked towards my professional goal, I had to be flexible and to gain more experience. This includes changing jobs as well as receiving promotions to get to where I am today. To work as a Biomedical Engineer, I've been promoted several times. To develop a Healthcare career, folks need to be flexible by way of changing job locations for promotions.

What do you do in your current job?

I work with Indian Health Service, Phoenix Indian Medical Center (PIMC) and Phoenix Area Office. Within PIMC, I manage the biomedical engineering department, which maintains all of the medical equipment, the surgical eye equipment, and the O.B.I. (On Board Imaging) equipment. Those are the more complex systems, and then of course the majority of the equipment is becoming a computer based network system, which is changing the biomed engineering field. Now I have to be knowledgeable in the field of medical equipment and the field of information technology. In addition, I do the consulting for several different hospitals and clinics within Arizona, Nevada, and Utah. This means that I travel to these locations and advised them about different equipment, how to get the equipment, and how to purchase it.

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If they are seriously interested, then I look at all the specs, including bringing medical equipment vendors in for a demonstration. Lastly, I look at their finances to make sure they have an adequate amount of money and I look at their current equipment to make sure it meets the standards found in codes and regulations.

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

It's difficult at times for young people to find a job especially if they do not have any experience. I applied for a lot of jobs and was rejected. I eventually proceeded to find a job in the private sector. My advice for students who are fresh out of college is not to give up and if you can find work in private sector first. You will be exposed to more in regards to advanced technology. You'll shine when you get into government healthcare.

Juan J. Lopez

Tribal Affiliation: Tohono O'odham

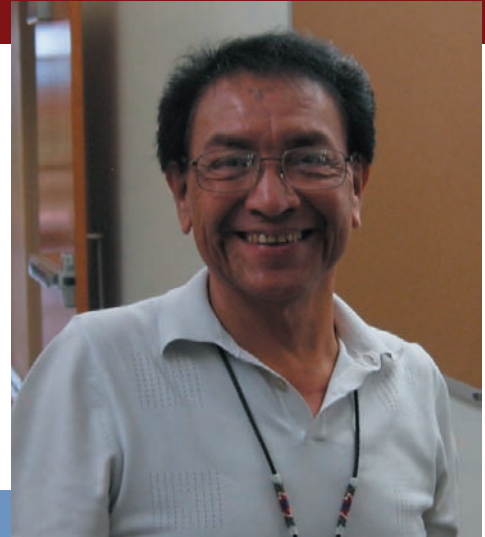
"My patients will be treated with respect."

Current Position: RN, Supervisor Nurse Specialist, San Simon Health Clinic Sells Service Unit

Health Professional Degree(s): ADN, BSN, MSN

Schools Attended: Maricopa Technical College, ADN, 1982; University of Phoenix, BSN, 1998, University of Phoenix, MSN, 2002

Area of Focus/Specialty: Nursing



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

Nursing was never a part of my career goals, and that changed drastically after my mother was a patient at one of the hospitals and the nursing staff treated her with undue respect. I made up my mind at that time that I would go into Nursing and make a difference in the way patients are treated at any given time and place. My patients will be treated with respect.

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

I was a people person and got along with all the contacts I made.

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

Initially, funding was an obstacle, but with changes in Tribal Scholarships, I took advantage of that resource to further my education.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a Nursing Supervisor with a staff of 1 RN, and 2 LPN's.

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

I would tell them to stay focused in their education and strive to better themselves in this ever changing world.

Marlene J. Saraficio

Tribal Affiliation: Tohono O'odham Nation

"Working with my own people was harder than I thought."

Current Position: Public Health Educator; Indian Health Services; San Simon Health Center

Health Professional Degree(s): BAEd Degree in Education with a minor in Physical Education, Early Childhood, Health Education, and Linguistic Endorsement; MAEd/Special Education; and working on a Master of Business Administration/Health Care Management.

Schools Attended: Arizona State University Upward Bound 1976; Tokyo, Japan 1977 – Cultural Exchange Program; University of Arizona; Med-Start Program 1978; Arizona State University Upward Bound 1979/ USC – Basketball Scholarship University of Southern California; Mesa Community College 1980-1981 – A.A. Arizona State University 1989 – BAEd. University of Phoenix 2004 – MAEd. / Business Administration/HCM – (abd 2009)

Area of Focus/Specialty: Diabetes Education, Childhood Obesity, General Health Education



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose this health career to enhance the knowledge of health education delivered among students and American Indians. It is important on how we educate patients in understanding and knowing the progression of certain diseases and how it can affect the human body and our lives.

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

I had a basketball coach who taught and encouraged our team to learn about our own functioning bodies and to ultimately enjoy life to the fullest. The knowledge gained, was a great fit. My goal is to help my O'odham people understand the complications on how it affect our lives and how we can prevent the complications and live a healthy lifestyle.

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

One obstacle I have found is that working with my own people was harder than I thought. My intelligence never quite seemed to be acknowledged. However, I feel that all professions are not hard, but it is a matter of how you do the job at hand, and how you interact and speak to people. I have enjoyed working for other Native American Tribes. That was a learning experience for me.

What do you do in your current job?

In my current job, I prepare and participate in the development of the Service Unit's short and long range written program plans. These plans include preparing a Comprehensive Health Education plan for the operation. In addition, I provide supportive services to the Service Unit staff (Medical, Dental, Nursing, Dietary, Administration, Community Health Services, etc.) by educating O'odham people about different types of diseases and their complications, such as diabetes, obesity, asthma, etc.

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

The field of healthcare is a great area to work in! It is a challenging field but overall an enjoyable experience. I work for the Indian Health Services (IHS), and it is a great place to work and is never boring. My advice is that if you like to help people, then a healthcare career is definitely for you. We need more Native American doctors, nurses, and healthcare educators.

Victoria Sullivan

Tribal Affiliation: Hualapai

"Once I was in the nursing field I loved every aspect of it."

Current Position: Registered Nurse, Clinical Nurse, Indian Health Service, Peach Springs Health Center

Health Professional Degree(s): Diploma Practical Nurse, Associate of Applied Science in Nursing

Schools Attended: Practical Nurse Program of East Tennessee, 1991; Mohave Community College, 2005

Area of Focus/Specialty: Nursing



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I wanted to be a nurse since I was a teenager. I had a short term goal of becoming a nurse as soon as I could, and a long term goal of becoming a registered nurse (RN). I had also planned to work on my reservation as a nurse after I gained some experience.

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

I knew I would always be a nurse from my early experiences in the nursing field. After I graduated from Practical Nurse school, I worked as a nurse at a large teaching hospital. I specialized in orthopedics and trauma. I loved it. Once I was in the nursing field I loved every aspect of it.

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

I encountered several obstacles along my health career path, which include the fact that my husband of 22 years died from a brain tumor (5 months out from diagnosis). At the same time, I had three teenagers I had to raise alone. Also, my mother became sick and started dialysis. She wanted me to move home to the reservation to help her and to raise my kids there. I found a job at the local Indian Health Service Clinic in Peach Springs as a licensed practical nurse (LPN). I didn't make a lot of money, but I loved being home caring for my family and community. My mother kept after me to go back to school to become an RN so I could make more money. She helped me fill out all of the paperwork for tons of different scholarships and nursing programs. I was lucky enough to be awarded an awesome scholarship from the Indian Health Service (IHS) that let me focus on school. This meant that I would need to work only one day a week, I still got my full salary! I also got accepted into a nursing program at the local college.

What do you do in your current job?

I'm a staff nurse in an IHS clinic, where we see 50-60 patients a day.

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

Health care is a great area to have a job. There are so many choices of fields to go into and specialties. Once you receive your degree, you can work in many different capacities serving native people.

Shandiin Wood

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo/Seminole

"Never ever stop asking questions."

Current Position: Social Worker, Kindred Healthcare, Tucson, Arizona

Health Professional Degree(s): BA in Psychology

Schools Attended: University of Arizona 2005

Area of Focus/Specialty: Long term care



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I've always wanted to work in public service and give.

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

The small moments that occur not very often but can make up for the long days and stress and justify every effort made to help another person or family.

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

Understanding the clinical narrative and how that has a direct effect on my job. For example, knowing how a person's psychosocial wellbeing and mood state can greatly affect all levels of a person's ability to rehabilitate.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a liaison between residents, family members, health care staff, and any external health organizations ensuring and coordinating a patient's plan of care while at the facility and for their discharge back into the community.

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

Don't hesitate or second-guess your odds or chances and never ever stop asking questions.

Judith A. (Youngdeer) Nelson

Tribal Affiliation: Eastern Band Cherokee Indians of North Carolina

"Have faith in yourself, and in your creator."

Current Position: Periodontal Disease Prevention Officer, IHS, Sells Indian Hospital, Sells, Arizona

Health Professional Degree(s): Associate of Science in Dental Hygiene, Bachelor of Science in Health Science

Schools Attended: Columbus College, Columbus, Ga., 1986, 1988

Area of Focus/Specialty: Dental Hygiene/Education



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I always knew that I wanted to work in the health field. I had to choose between nursing and dentistry.

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

Before I became a Registered Dental Hygienist, I was a dental assistant for both the IHS (Indian Health Service) and a private practice company. I also tried working as a social worker for one year before going to college to become a dental hygienist. By then, I knew that I wanted to stay in the dental field.

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

I began college at the age of 35, with all the responsibilities of having a family (husband, and 3 children). It was anything but easy. However, with the support of my husband, my parents, and financial assistance from my tribe, I was able to achieve my goal.

What do you do in your current job?

I am a USPHS Commissioned Corps Officer, and I hold the rank of Commander. I have been a PHS officer for over 16 years. My current title is: Periodontal Disease Prevention Officer for the Sells Indian Hospital Dental Clinic. I also provide dental hygiene services to patients 2 days a week at the San Xavier Dental Clinic in Tucson. In addition to my dental clinical duties, I provide dental screenings, and oral health education in a diabetic clinic once a month. Our school sealant program keeps us busy with screenings and transporting mobile dental equipment to schools to provide dental sealants, and oral health education to young students.

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

Find a discipline that you are interested in. Find someone within that discipline that you can talk to. Check with your tribe and IHS to find out what financial assistance is available. Last, but not least, don't give up on your dreams. If you want an education, find a starting point, and don't let anyone make you believe that you can't finish! Have faith in yourself, and in your creator.

Jennifer Swift Martin

Tribal Affiliation: San Carlos Apache

"Whatever health career you choose will benefit your tribe."

Current Position: Assistant Librarian, Arizona Health Sciences Library, College of Medicine, University of Arizona

Health Professional Degree(s): BA in Chemistry; Masters of Arts in Information Resources and Library Science

Schools Attended: University of Arizona, BA 2002, MA 2007

Area of Focus/Specialty: Pharmaceutical & Biotechnology Industries, Special Libraries, Drug Information Resources, Chemistry



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

I chose this career because I saw a need for information professionals with knowledge in the sciences, especially physical and health sciences. In my case, I saw an opportunity to apply my knowledge of chemistry and my research experience to librarianship.

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

After college, I worked in several areas of research and discovered that I had an interest in this particular field. During my first year in library school, I was hired as an intern at a local biotechnology company. My degree in chemistry and my research experience gave me an advantage in working with the scientists in research and development.

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

My first task as a professional librarian at the biotechnology company was to develop a virtual library from the ground up. The company did not have a library at the time, but was growing at a substantial rate and needed information resources that would allow them to be on the forefront of science and technology. Although I was new to the profession, I was able to find a faculty mentor in library school who guided me through this process and helped me be successful.

What do you do in your current job?

Currently I serve as the liaison to the College of Pharmacy where I spend the majority of my time. I regularly meet with faculty, actively participate in grant projects, guest lecture in professional pharmacy courses and provide information support to students in the program.

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

There will always be a need for American Indians in the health professions. Whatever health career you choose will benefit your tribe, from infants to elders. Your chosen profession can help increase your tribe's ability to attain good spiritual, mental, and physical health.

Teresita Young

Tribal Affiliation: Tohono O'odham

"No matter what the obstacles were that came into my path I was determined not to let them keep me away from my goal."

Current Position: Dietetic Technician, Sells Indian Hospital, Sells, Arizona

Health Professional Degree(s): BS in Nutrition

Schools Attended: Haskell Indian Jr. College 1984 and Arizona State University 2007

Area of Focus/Specialty: Nutrition and Dietetics



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

First, I was interested in a nursing career because my mother was a public health nurse. I found it interesting in that she helped people who were ill and provided medical support. I worked one summer as a dietitian's assistant; my duties were filing, answering phones, organizing recipes and occasionally, she would let me sit in on one of her appointments, and hear her counsel someone on dietary changes, activities, menu planning, etc. This was when I knew that I wanted to be a dietitian and work in the field of nutrition.

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

I liked working in the dietitian's office and with the cooks. Occasionally, the dietitian would put me to work in the kitchen assisting the cook. From there, I gained experience working with a variety of different diets (modified diets, low fat, diabetic, etc.), and kitchen equipment. When I started taking my major classes (300-400 level courses), I worked two summers with the Navajo Nation WIC office in Window Rock, AZ. I also worked one year, full-time, as a diet aide at a retirement community within the nursing care unit in Scottsdale, AZ. I prepared and served food to the senior residents. Through these experiences, I knew for sure that I wanted to work in the field of nutrition and dietetics.

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

Money was scarce, but with the help of my husband, my mother, and student loans I was able to meet my financial needs for school. Getting married and raising a son and daughter early in my education was difficult too, but I learned to balance my time between raising my family and keeping up with my studies. By the time I graduated, I had four children. My husband worked and helped as much as he possibly could so that I could complete my degree. My goal was to graduate with a bachelor's degree. No matter what the obstacles were that came into my path, I was determined not to let them keep me away from my goal.

What do you do in your current job?

As a diet technician, I screen patients who come into the hospital. I refer high risk patients to the dietitian. I provide ongoing services such as diet assessments, patient food preferences, including likes, dislikes, and food allergies; basic nutrition education is provided by me as needed. In addition, I cook, order food, and check the patient tray line as well as assist in the menu planning. Another duty I perform is that of inventory in which I inventory all the food items we have in stock. Nutritional contacts are reported to my supervisor on a monthly basis by me. Nutritional information is documented on the screening forms or a SOAP note(s) in the patient chart by me. Lastly, it is my job to update the patient kardex information in the kitchen and review all dietary changes and/or food allergies with the cooks. I attend daily morning rounds with the medical staff, nursing, pharmacy, social worker and dietitian for

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Teresita Young

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the patient's plan of care and discharge plan.

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

We need native people to work in the health field. Currently, we have one Tohono O'odham registered dietitian that I know about. I have worked with and have taken classes with several Navajos who are now registered dietitians. I would advise someone who wants to go into this field to do their best in all their studies such as reading, writing, and math. I would recommend starting out at a community college before transferring to a university. It is very important to stay in school and get good grades so that you can qualify for scholarships; stay focused on completing your degree before getting married and starting a family.

Naomi Jean Young

Tribal Affiliation: Navajo

"I told my mom, 'I want to be a doctor so I can help.'"

Current Position: University of Arizona College of Medicine, 4th year medical student

Health Professional Degree(s): Bachelor of Science in Molecular Biology (BS), Doctor of Medicine (MD)

Schools Attended: University of Arizona (BS 2003, MD 2009)

Area of Focus/Specialty: Pediatrics or Family Practice



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

When I was a child I was riding my bike and my leg was bitten by a rez (reservation) dog. I spent hours in the IHS ER waiting room crying and wondering, "Why does it take so long?" My mother comforted me and said, "The doctors are busy and they have a lot of people to see shiyazhi (my little one). There aren't enough doctors." So with my pony tail, a baseball cap and an ice pack on my leg, I told my mom, "I want to be a doctor so I can help." Little did I know how true those words would be and how that visit to the emergency room would shape my life and goals. Thus, in high school I fell in love with science, in college I was mentored by American Indian physicians, and as a graduate student I broadened my perspective of medicine to include health policy. Thus, with deeply rooted motivation I want to be a Navajo physician practicing at home on the Navajo reservation.

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

I started college with firm motivation for science because of the high school Math and Science for Minority Students (MS2) program in Andover, Massachusetts. I conducted liver transplant research with the Department of Surgery/Section of Transplantation in college. After college, I studied stem cells at the National Institutes of Health in Maryland and as a graduate student I researched Diabetes and Kidney failure with Translational Genomics Research Institute in Phoenix. I loved my degree in Molecular Biology and what medical applications it had, but I also loved the opposite spectrum too, the high paced political health arena. The Barbara Jordan Health Policy Scholars Program in Washington DC offered a summer on Capitol Hill as I learned the political measures of health care funding, particularly IHS, and how health care disparities evolved from legislation. Ultimately, based on my Navajo belief of Hozho (everything is related) and applying this to health, I knew that being a physician would allow me to weave together clinical research, clinical medicine and to help reform health policy.

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

I am a hard worker and being in medical school has been my most difficult challenge academically, psychologically, and spiritually. I overcame academic struggles with help from faculty, study groups with colleagues, and support from family and friends. I continue to seek support through spiritual measures both in Tucson, AZ and at home in Sawmill, AZ. Not being able to go home because of my schedule was the hardest for me to deal with, especially when I needed reassurance and to refocus. There were semesters when I felt like a failure and felt like quitting was an option but with family and friends pushing me, I was able to clear my mind and push forward. Overall, the medical school experience has been tough but there is a light at the end of the tunnel and my friends and family are always there when I need them.

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Naomi Jean Young

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What do you do in your current job?

Currently, I am a medical student doing clinical rotations and studying for the national licensing exams. I enjoy working with the younger population in the clinic, but I also enjoy the pathology of elderly health. There is never a dull moment while on the wards.

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

Don't mess around in college because programs are competitive. Travel to conferences and abroad if there is an opportunity to do so. Talk with as many health care professionals as you can. Medicine has so much to offer and I feel mentoring boosts confidence for application. Find your niche of students interested in health professions and keep track of each other. Support from friends is priceless through college and beyond. Colleagues are your support on a day to day basis. Return home to the reservation even if you did not grow up on the rez (reservation) because experience is a driving force. It is always an eye opener to observe any rez town and note implications for public health, clinical health, and health policy. The rez always needs improvement and when you return home you will reinforce your motivation.

Rose Ramon

Tribal Affiliation: Tohono O'Odham

"Don't be afraid to ask for help."

Current Position: Lead Dental Assistant, Sells Service Unit, Sells, Arizona

Health Professional Degree(s): Certified Dental Assistant

Schools Attended: Apollo College, Tucson, Arizona, 1992

Area of Focus/Specialty: Oral Hygiene



Why did you choose your specific health professional career?

As a youth, I worked in the dental department. While there I enjoyed working with the patients as well as seeing the dental assistants work one on one with patients to make a difference in each patient's oral hygiene. The patients left that office happy after they realized that they could make a difference by using techniques that were shown to them by the dental assistants.

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

Several experiences that I had came from visits to the Well Child Clinic with my own children. I noticed that there was a large amount of baby bottle tooth decay in many children. This led me to make a difference in my own family's oral hygiene. I made sure they had regular checkups. In addition, I didn't give my children a lot of sweets and I took the time to help them brush their teeth correctly.

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

When I made the decision to attend Apollo College, I had lost the father to my children. The realization that I was now the sole provider for my children made me work harder to get into school and keep up with my attendance. I disciplined myself to be on top of my work and I encouraged my children to always do well in school. Through the example of my determination, I have opened more doors for my children to work hard on at their education as well as sports and not to be afraid to take on any challenge.

What do you do in your current job?

As a lead Dental Assistant it is my job to oversee the every day duties of the clinic. This includes working on patients care, being a liaison between staff and patients, as well as working with the receptionist. I am also responsible for coordinating work schedules and work orders. The new employee orientation in our department administers the dental radiographic quality test. I also work with the Tohono O'Odham Nation Police department to expedite the forensic identification procedure as well as the Tohono O'Odham Nation's Solid Waste Department for Bio-Hazard Material/ Chemicals for the proper disposal. The most important duty as a dental assistant is to be the right hand of the dentist at all times and to remain at the chair side.

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

My advice would be to study hard and don't be afraid to ask for help. Learn to be patient and pray every day; this is where I got a lot of my strength from. If you decide to go to college for four years, time goes by fast and before you know it, you are on your way to fulfilling your dream.

For Further Information:

UA/ITCA Indians Into Medicine (INMED) Program

500 N. Tucson Blvd., #110

Tucson AZ 85716

Phone: 520-318-7280

Fax: 520-318-7017

Email: mangel@u.arizona.edu

Website: <http://inmed.fcm.arizona.edu>

Outreach and Multicultural Affairs

College of Medicine

The University of Arizona

Room 1119B

PO Box 245140

Tucson AZ 85724-5140

Phone: 520-621-5531

Fax: 520-626-2895

Email: astuck@email.arizona.edu

Website: <http://www.diversity.medicine.arizona.edu/index.html>

For further information on health careers in Arizona:

Website: <http://www.healthcareers.arizona.edu>

For information on physician careers:

Association of American Medical Colleges

AspiringDocs.org

Website: <http://www.aspiringdocs.org>

Association of American Indian Physicians

Website: <http://www.aaip.org>

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.

Explore Health Careers
<http://www.explorehealthcareers.org>

AZ Caring Careers
<http://www.azcaringcareers.com>

American Indian Science & Engineering Society (AISES)
<http://www.aises.org>

Health Careers in Alaska
http://www.healthcareersinalaska.info/index.php/camps_and_internships/info/nih-niddk

Spectrum Unlimited
<http://www.spectrumunlimited.com>

Area Health Education Centers (AHECs)
<http://www.nationalahec.org/home/index.asp>
In Arizona, visit the website:
<http://www.azahec.org/resources/careers/index.asp>

College Board
<http://www.collegeboard.com>

Considering a Medical Career
<http://www.aamc.org/students/considering/start.htm>

National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions (NAAHP)
<http://www.naahp.org>

Medical College Admission Test (MCAT)
<http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/>

American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine (AACOM)
<http://www.aacom.org>

Summer Medical and Dental Program (SMDEP)
<http://www.smdep.org>

American Indian Graduate Center
<http://www.aigc.com>

Gates Millennium Scholars (GMS)

<http://www.gmsp.org>

Health Resource Guide

<http://www.healthguideusa.com/federal.htm>

Center of American Indian and Minority Health, University of Minnesota

<http://www.caimh.org>

Native American Center of Excellence, University of Washington School of Medicine

<http://faculty.washington.edu/dacosta/nacoe/nacoehome.html>

Indians into Medicine (INMED) – U. North Dakota

<http://www.med.und.nodak.edu/depts/inmed/index.html>

Headlands Indian Health Careers Summer Program

<http://www.headlands.ouhsc.edu>

Society for Advancement of Chicanos and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS)

<http://www.sacnas.org>

American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy (AACP)

www.aacp.org

American Indian College Fund

<http://www.collegefund.org>

Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry

<http://www.opted.org>

American Dental Education Association (ADEA)

<http://www.adea.org>

American Dental Association (ADA)

<http://www.ada.org>

Society of American Indian Dentists (SAID)

<http://www.aaip.org/about/said.htm>

Indian Health Services (IHS)

<http://www.ihs.gov>

