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GENERAL MEMORANDUM 09-121

Indian Health Service Solicits Tribal Input on Internal Reform

On September 4, 2009, Indian Health Service (IHS) Director Roubideaux sent the attached letter to tribal leaders soliciting suggestions on ways that the IHS can improve its internal operations. A similar solicitation was sent to IHS employees in August 2009.

Dr. Roubideaux asks tribes to:

- Identify their top three priorities for reforming the IHS
- Send recommendations to IHSReform@ihs.gov
- Submit the recommendations by October 16, 2009

The Indian Health Service has a web site, www.ihs.gov/reforms, which will be dedicated to information related to its internal reform.

Please let us know if we may provide additional information or assistance with regard to the submission of recommendations for reform of the Indian health Service.

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Inquiries may be directed to:

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SEP 4 2009

Indian Health Service
Rockville MD 20852

Dear Tribal Leader:

I am writing to update you on the current status of our efforts to gather your input on national health reform. **I am also requesting your recommendations and ideas for internal reform of the Indian Health Service (IHS).**

I appreciate your feedback and recommendations in response to my June Tribal Leader Letter for ideas on **national health reform**. I also am grateful for and encouraged by Tribal Leader participation during our July 7 Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) tribal consultation listening session on health reform in Denver, Colorado.

Congress is currently discussing a number of strategies to implement national health reform that may impact the Indian health system. The IHS has reviewed the input provided to date and is working with HHS to develop the Department's position on national health reform. When Congress asks us to weigh in on their proposals, I am confident that your contributions will enable us to provide comments to help underscore how important it is that national health reform positively impact the Indian health system and the patients we serve. I am particularly gratified that we were able to defer development of the HHS position until we heard from Tribes. This is a part of my first priority, which is to renew and strengthen our partnership with Tribes.

I am writing you today to begin the process for **bringing reform to the IHS**, which is my second priority as the new IHS Director. As I stated in my Senate confirmation speech, in order to get the support we so dearly need, we need to demonstrate change and improvement in the Indian health system. We need to look at what we are doing well, and do more of it, as well as be honest about what we are not doing well, and take steps to develop solutions for these problem areas. There are a number of areas where we could begin, including whether large system changes are needed, and/or whether specific areas need to improve, such as contract health services, hiring, contracting, recruitment/retention, facilities, allocation methodologies, customer service, clinical services, administrative practices, etc.

To that end, I need your help now to determine where we begin. I am **requesting your Tribe's input** of your **top three priorities** for reforming the IHS by **Friday, October 16, 2009**. Please submit your top three recommendations by e-mail to IHSReform@ihs.gov. Your recommendations will assist us as we identify and prioritize areas most in need of improvement. I am also asking IHS staff for their input and will review their comments with you in the near future. In developing your submissions, you may also want to develop and submit input from local, regional, or national Tribal organizations.

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I also plan to convene a tribal consultation meeting to discuss the results of this request and to plan our next steps together as we work to reform the IHS. If you would like to recommend a location or specific date to hold the tribal consultation meeting, please include this information in the e-mail with your three priorities.

As we go forward, communicating with you on the status of ongoing initiatives becomes ever more vital to our long-term success. One of my priorities is to develop strategies to be more transparent about our work. Last month, the IHS rolled out a new tool to help us keep track of our progress on internal IHS reform. The Web site, www.ihs.gov/reforms, will feature updates and related information on internal IHS reform.

I look forward to working with you to bring change and improvement to the IHS.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yvette Roubideaux". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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