

2021 Division of Nursing Services Nurse of the Month

Teressa Martinez has been part of the Wellpinit Service Unit (WSU) for over 18 years. Originally hired as the Tribal Diabetes Director, she quickly became a healthcare leader in the community. In 2013, Teressa was hired as an Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner and CAC, becoming an indispensable member of the WSU team. In addition to her role as the CAC, she maintained a full panel of patients. Providing a full continuum of care to a panel of patients required a significant amount of balance between both roles. During times of significant nursing shortages, Teressa was assigned as the Nurse Supervisor at WSU. This willingness to meet the mission of the IHS is unsurpassed.

In 2019, Teressa was selected as the Patient Advocate working closely with WSU leadership as a healthcare navigator to the community. In this role, Teressa was critical in the COVID-19 response. She worked closely with their only Public Health Nurse in establishing a COVID testing plan. She provided direct patient care as a provider, a nurse, and a patient advocate and remained present at the service unit in their greatest time of need. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the WSU Chief Executive Officer position became vacant. Once again, Teressa was asked to provide the necessary leadership needed for all healthcare operations at WSU. She has conducted weekly ICS and Emergency Leadership meetings with the PAO and maintained constant communication with the Spokane Tribal Council. She has partnered with the tribe in coordinated screening clinics for the community and tribal workforce. She worked closely with the clinic vaccine coordinator to develop a vaccine roll out plan to include the Spokane Reservation, Spokane Tribal employees, Spokane Tribal Enterprises and the Wellpinit School District. This also included coordinating collaboration between the Wellpinit School District and Native Project to ensure teachers were fully vaccinated by the end of January.

As a nurse, Teressa knew the importance of contact tracing. As the Acting CEO and Nurse Practitioner, Teressa partnered with the sole PHN to manage all contact tracing on the Spokane Reservation. In addition, she collaborated with the Enterprises to develop onsite contact tracing with the Chewelah and Spokane Casinos. In her leadership role, she presented at Town Hall meetings and provided COVID-19 updates to the Spokane Tribal General Council. All of these are important to the nursing program; however, their importance has been even more vital during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. In particular, Teressa has been the driving force behind the WSU COVID vaccine response. She has completed all training to become a subject matter expert on the vaccines, and has put all appropriate processes in place to ensure that WSU is able to administer these vaccines to the Wellpinit community in a safe and efficient manner. She coordinated with the Spokane Tribe to use their pow-wow grounds as a mass vaccine site, and then set up the facility to provide patients with an efficient mass vaccination process.

Teressa's dedication to the mission is unwavering. She has gone to great lengths to ensure our patients had quick and easy access to the COVID vaccine. She is the very definition of a nurse; professional, hardworking, dedicated, and caring.

To date, WSU has administered over 3,310 COVID vaccines, over 62% of the active user population has received at least one dose of vaccine, and 93% of WSU staff are fully vaccinated. Most remarkable is that 78% of the community elders are vaccinated. These successes are all due to the remarkable efforts of Teressa Martinez. This would not have been possible without her leadership and hard work.

I am pleased to nominate Teressa Martinez for the DNS IHS Nurse of the Month. Ms. Martinez is fully compliant with all requirements of federal service employees. There are no adverse or disciplinary actions pending against this individual.