



Indian Health Service Press Release

Nov. 17, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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American College of Emergency Physicians Offers Expertise to Indian Health Service on Emergency Services

The Indian Health Service (IHS) today announced an innovative collaboration with the American College of Emergency Physicians (ACEP) that will leverage ACEP's nationwide expertise in emergency room practices to improve the quality of care and management in the 26 emergency departments at IHS's federal government operated hospitals in rural and remote Native communities.

"We are excited to have access to some of the top emergency physicians in the country to share best practices and resources and to help improve the quality and practices at emergency departments at IHS hospitals nationwide," said IHS Principal Deputy Director Mary L. Smith. "This collaboration with the American College of Emergency Physicians builds upon the aggressive strategy at IHS to improve quality health care for the patients we serve and dovetails with the new [Quality Framework](#) announced yesterday that provides a roadmap for quality at every level of IHS – from headquarters, to the area offices, and the service units at the front lines of delivering care."

Through this work session, IHS and ACEP are leveraging its top-level physicians and emergency medical professionals in order to share training resources and knowledge of telehealth and emergency care. This action helps advance IHS's larger, ongoing efforts to provide American Indian and Alaskan Native communities with the best quality care possible in a patient-centered, safe, trusted and efficient manner. IHS also is committed to sharing best practices, models, and policies with Tribes and Urban Indian programs and strengthening partnerships with Tribes, local communities and regional health care systems.

"We are honored to work with the American College of Emergency Physicians and the Indian Health Service to help provide key resources and best practices to frontier and rural emergency departments," said Dr. Vindell Washington, National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, who spoke at the work session. "This session is an important step in our ongoing collaboration with Indian Health Service facilities and our clinical partners."

The work session covered a variety of topics including emergency department leadership; responsibility, accountability, workflow, workforce issues in rural facilities; how emergency telemedicine can help meet the health care needs of patients in rural areas and identifying areas for leveraging resources in the future.

The work session took place at the IHS Omaha-Winnebago Hospital in Winnebago, Nebraska and was also live streamed so that a broader nationwide audience of IHS medical professionals would benefit from the insights and expertise offered by ACEP leadership.

“Emergency physicians are dedicated to advancing and improving emergency care in rural areas and in large cities,” said ACEP Immediate Past President, Dr. Jay Kaplan. “We applaud the leadership of the Indian Health Service and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in hosting this important event.” ACEP promotes the highest quality of emergency care and is the leading advocate for emergency physicians, their patients and the public.

The [newly released IHS Quality Framework](#) describes the vision, goals, and priorities to develop, implement, and sustain an effective quality program that improves patient experience and outcomes, strengthens organizational capacity and ensures the delivery of reliable, high quality health care for IHS Direct Service facilities. The Quality Framework is a product of input from quality experts from within IHS, tribal partners, and resources from the Department of Health and Human Services, particularly the Executive Council on Quality Care, all singularly focused on ways to concentrate our efforts on improving quality health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives.

As part of a major initiative to improve access to quality care, IHS is expanding access to specialty care for its patients in the Great Plains through a telehealth contract. In September, [IHS awarded a telemedicine services contract to Avera Health](#) to provide services to the seven hospitals and other health centers and facilities in the Great Plains. The contract will strengthen existing IHS services for patients by enabling IHS facilities to offer additional specialty services and appointments to ensure patients have the fastest possible access to the health care they need. The contract will include additional emergency medical services at hospitals in the Great Plains Area as well as providing additional access for American Indian and Alaska Native patients to see specialists in behavioral health; cardiology; maternal and child health; nephrology; pain management; pediatric behavioral health; rheumatology; wound care; ear, nose and throat care; and dermatology.

IHS has a long history of using telemedicine to meet the needs of patients to include the [IHS TeleBehavioral Health Center of Excellence](#) which promotes the delivery of high quality, culturally competent telebehavioral health services and the [IHS Teleophthalmology Program](#) to screen IHS patients for diabetic retinopathy, the leading cause of blindness in patients with diabetes.

The IHS, an agency in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, provides a comprehensive health service delivery system for approximately 2.2 million American Indians and Alaska Natives.

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