

## **IHS pharmacists: Managing medications and improving health outcomes**

### **Issue**

Health professional recruitment and retention remains a challenge for the Indian Health Services (IHS). As in the general population, the annual number of prescriptions for American Indians and Alaskan Natives continues to rise. Without access to the medication management services of a pharmacist the health outcomes improvements associated with medication use are reduced or eliminated completely.

Recruitment (as of 12/2008)  
 Pharmacist Vacancies – 128  
 Pharmacist Vacancy Rate – 13%

### **Recommendation**

Funding for both the pharmacy resident training program and the loan repayment program should be continued with substantial increases.

IHS Program	FY 2009	FY2010 Recommended
Pharmacy Resident Training Program	\$620,000	\$1,000,000
Health Professions Loan Repayment Program	\$38.5 million (House Interior 6/11/08)	\$43.4 million (5% increase from FOIH FY09 request)

### **Rationale**

The health status of American Indians and Alaskan Natives can be improved only by providing better access to care. Access to care is dependent on a sufficient number of health professionals to provide timely and necessary care. With the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimating a high demand for pharmacists for the foreseeable future, it makes sense to dedicate resources to programs that have a proven track record of recruiting and retaining pharmacists as employees of the Indian Health Service.

### **Current Law**

The IHS loan repayment program is authorized under 25 USC Section 1616a.  
 The IHS pharmacy resident training program is authorized under 25 USC Section 1616d.

### **Background**

The ability of the IHS to compete with the private sector is very limited. It does have at its disposal two programs that have been successful in recruiting and retaining pharmacists. These programs are:

- the pharmacist resident training program; and
- the health professions loan repayment program.

The IHS employs nearly 15,000 health professionals. This number includes over 499 pharmacist commissioned officers. For several years now the IHS has had a double-digit vacancy rate for pharmacists. It currently stands at 13% (December 2008). IHS pharmacists are an integral part of health care delivery, providing substantial clinical input into disease management, patient compliance and assuring patient medication safety. With diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic diseases prevalent in Native American and Alaskan Native populations at a rate that surpasses the United States average, pharmacists are educated to provide the detailed clinical medication information that supports the physician's clinical diagnosis. The patient, physician, pharmacist team is primary to improved patient outcomes and quality of life.

### **Pharmacy Residency Training Program** (information current as of November 2008):

- Pharmacy Residents Trained (includes current residents in training) since July 2000: **113**
- Participated in the IHS Pharmacy Residency Program AND are active duty commissioned officers in the USPHS: 72/99 (73%).
- Four (4) residency graduates are currently active duty in the BOP.
- Breakdown of the 27 (27%) residents that have left USPHS:
  - 12 (12%) left after one year
  - 8 (8%) left after two years
  - 4 (4%) left after 3 years
  - 3 (3%) left after 5 year
- Leadership Positions:
  - Six (6) residency graduates are now IHS Residency Program Directors
  - Five (5) residency graduates are in Advanced Practice Pharmacist (Clinical) positions
  - Seven (7) residency graduates are in Chief Pharmacist or Assistant Chief Pharmacist positions.
  - Three (3) graduates are in specialty positions in support of the IHS mission
  - Several graduates are in mid-career/senior pharmacy positions.

#### **Alaska**

Alaska Native Medical Center, Anchorage 9 residents trained / 8 remain in the USPHS

#### **Arizona**

Chinle Comprehensive Health Care Facility, Chinle 7 residents trained / 3 remain in the USPHS

Phoenix Indian Medical Center, Phoenix 8 residents trained / 6 remain in the USPHS

Whiteriver Indian Hospital, Whiteriver 8 residents trained / 7 remain in the USPHS

#### **New Mexico**

Albuquerque 3 residents trained / 3 remain in the USPHS

Gallup Indian Medical Center, Gallup 14 residents trained / 8 remain in the USPHS

Santa Fe Indian Hospital, Santa Fe 6 residents trained / 5 remain in the USPHS

Northern Navajo Medical Center, Shiprock 8 residents trained / 5 remain in the USPHS

#### **North Carolina**

Cherokee Indian Hospital, Cherokee 7 residents trained / 7 remain in the USPHS

#### **Oklahoma**

Choctaw Nation Health Care Facility, Tahlequah 4 residents trained / 3 remain in the USPHS

Claremore Indian Hospital, Claremore 9 residents trained / 5 remain in the USPHS

W.W. Hastings Indian Hospital, Tahlequah 8 residents trained / 6 remain in the USPHS

#### **Oregon**

Warm Spring Indian Health Center, Warm Springs 7 residents trained / 5 remain in the USPHS

### **Scholarship and Loan Repayment Program** (information current as of December 2008):

Scholarship Program (Sections 103 & 104)

PrePharmacy Students Funded – Total 16 (9 new, 7 continuation)

Pharmacy Students Funded – Total 33 (2 new, 31 continuation)

Pharmacy Students Unable to Fund Due to Lack of Funding – Total 14 (new students)

Loan Repayment Program (Section 108)

Pharmacist Loan Repayment Contracts Funded – 89 (52 new and 37 extensions – Cost \$3,488,140)

Pharmacists Working for IHS Unable to Be Funded in FY 2008 – Total 34 (funds needed \$1,756,848)

#### **Additional resources:**

IHS website: <http://www.ihs.gov>

IHS pharmacy website: <http://www.pharmacy.ihs.gov>

IHS loan repayment website: <http://www.ihs.gov/JobCareerDevelop/DHPS/index.asp>

Bureau of Labor Statistics: [www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov)

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