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Health, Education, and Human Services Committee approves report from the Center for Native American Health (CNAH)

WINDOW ROCK – Last Wednesday, the Health, Education, and Human Services Committee received a report regarding the Center for Native American Health (CNAH), presented by founder and director, Dr. Gayle Dine’ Chacon from the University of New Mexico Health Sciences Center.

CNAH was founded in 2002 and established to develop partnerships between tribal communities in New Mexico and the UNM School of Medicine. CNAH aims to provide Native American student outreach, recruitment and retention into health professions by interacting with tribal and off-reservation schools and communities.

“Since the 12 years that CNAH has been in operation, we have provided outreach, technical assistance education, cancer education, research development, behavioral health needs and student development recruitment retention with American Indians into medicine,” stated Dr. Chacon.

EHSC chair Council Delegate Jonathan Hale (Oak Springs, St. Michaels) shared his encouragement and stressed the importance of the program for Navajo students.

“The assistance comes back to us as a committee to have that dialogue with UNM to ensure that this program still survives with the information that was given because there is a significant number of Navajo students attending UNM,” stated Delegate Hale.

EHSC member Council Delegate Kenneth Maryboy (Mexican Water, Aneth, Teecnospos, Tólikan, Red Mesa) expressed his appreciation to Dr. Chacon, noting that she has overcome turmoil and change within her career.

“I admire the University because your students and departments have done some research regarding the contaminants of water regarding the Utah water issues,” stated Delegate Maryboy.

Currently, CNAH has a budget of approximately \$486,000 and receives the Indians into Medicine (INMED) Grant, funded by IHS. The program is currently seeking a five-year grant renewal, which will continue to fund the majority of Native American students.

“Right now, given the situation of our organization, due to funds with a grant with IHS [INMED grant], we are not sure whether our organization is going to be able to continue to support our health care students to make sure they graduate,” stated CNAH Program Specialist, Mikaela Crank Thinn.

Despite a decrease in funding and staffing this past year, CNAH continues to deliver educational and training sessions to communities on the Navajo Nation.

According to the report, nearly 5% of students of UNM Health Science Center are Native American and the majority of them are Navajo. In the 2013-2014 academic year, UNMHSC had approximately 130 Native American students seeking various degrees in medicine, pharmacy, nursing, physical therapy and public health.

“We hope that Navajo Nation is able to enter into an Intergovernmental Agreement with UNM to ensure that Native American students’ developmental programs are appropriately funded and continues to support CNAH and the goals and objectives of student development,” stated Dr. Chacon.

HEHSC members voted 3-0 to accept the report.

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