



The Navajo Nation
Yideeskáądi Nitsáhákees

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Navajo President Buu Nygren continues tradition of Johns Hopkins research with signing of MOU to continue legacy of Navajo women’s, children’s care

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren has continued an almost 40-year legacy of medical research, women’s and children’s health care and collaboration between Johns Hopkins University of Baltimore, Md., and the Navajo Epidemiology Center.

On May 10, the President welcomed the director of the Johns Hopkins Center for Indigenous Health, a renowned Navajo physician and researcher, and 15 Navajo employees for the signing of a five-year extension of a Memorandum of Understanding between JHU and the Navajo center.

“I’m really looking forward to this MOU and the work you’re going to be doing,” the President told them. “I know there are a lot of our people who struggle with diabetes, struggle with addictions, struggle with mental health and struggle with behavioral health issues. Through research and working with the number one public health institution, we’re just really honored to have you here on Navajo.”

Dr. Allison Barlow, who directs the JHU Center for Indigenous Health, said it was an honor for her

women staff to attend the signing of the important continuance of service to the Navajo people.



Navajo Nation President Buu Nygren continues the tradition of medical research and women’s and children’s health care by extending a memorandum of understanding between Johns Hopkins University of Baltimore, Md., and the Navajo Epidemiology Center.

“And I feel so humbled to work among these incredible people,” she told President Nygren. “They’re just amazing. I’ve learned so much from the *Diné* people about selflessness and work and service to people.”

She said the MOU will permit JHU to work from a strengths-based and cultural strengths-based perspective, from the littlest ones to the eldest Navajo people.

“We are here in service to the Nation,” she said. “We look forward to developing an even a bigger relationship with Director (Kim) Russell. It’s an unprecedented opportunity. We have the strongest staff that we’ve ever, ever had.”

Dr. Barlow said the Navajo staff was grateful to be able to continue service in women’s and children’s health, training, nutrition, water security, suicide prevention, behavioral health and addiction prevention.

Today the Center has five sites on the Navajo Nation, 82% of its employees are Indigenous, 90% of the Center’s team works in Indigenous communities in more than 165 locations and employees 310 staff members.



President Nygren hears of Johns Hopkins University research history from the Navajo doctor who made it, Dr. Raymond Reid, and Dr. Allison Barlow, director of the JHU Center for American Indian Health.

Johns Hopkins University began its research on the Navajo Nation in the 1980s when Dr. Raymond Reid, one of the first Navajo physician who attended the signing, and Dr. Mathuram Santosham, pediatrician, founder of the center, career researcher and advocate for Native American health issues, did groundbreaking research on the *Haemophilus influenzae* type b vaccine in the 1990s at the former Tuba City Indian

Health Service Hospital, now the Tuba City Regional Health Care Corporation.

HiB causes meningitis, pneumonia, sepsis and other serious complications, especially in children.



Kim Russell, director of the Navajo Nation Department of Health, meets legendary Johns Hopkins University researcher Dr. Mathuram Santosham who dedicated his career to Native health.

Bacterial meningitis – infection of the meninges, spinal fluid and brain – killed or neurologically devastated babies if it was not detected and treated quickly.

It has been a major cause of child mortality in developing countries.

The HiB and pneumococcal vaccine trials at Tuba City, which saw one of the highest rates of infection in the world among Navajo children, today is credited with saving 1.45 million children's lives around the world since 2000.

HiB meningitis was 8 to 15 times more common in the Southwest Native American population than in any other ethnic or geographic group in the U.S. The HiB vaccines were so effective that today few if any board certified pediatricians on the Navajo Nation have ever seen a case of HiB meningitis in their careers.

Another success of the Center’s research was the demonstration of the effectiveness of oral rehydration therapy to prevent infant deaths from diarrhea – otherwise known as the creation of Pedialyte. This research was led by Drs. Santosham and Reid.

Dr. Reid, who grew up in Cove, Ariz., was a senior research associate at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Before retiring, he worked for 40 years on the Navajo, Hopi, White Mountain Apache and San Carlos Apache reservations.

“Thank you for your dedication, your service to the Navajo people,” President Nygren told the group. “I’m certain that there are so many Navajo people and families that appreciate you. What you embody every day is what I tell my team members, that you’ve got to have a sense of duty to serve.”

Kim Russell, executive director of the Navajo Nation Department of Health, said the MOU will continue Johns Hopkins nearly 40-year history of health care service and research on the Navajo Nation.

She said its purpose is to promote collaboration on behalf of the university’s Center for Indigenous Health and the Navajo Epidemiology Center.

The President asked Director Russell and Del Yazzie, director of the Navajo Epidemiology Center, to send health information to his office for him to include in his weekly Thursday radio and Facebook reports to the Navajo people.

Once it was common for Navajo people to live over 100 years, he said.

“How do we get back to that status of really making sure that we take care of our health, take care of our mind, so that we can live a full life up to 102?” he asked. “It’s really strong Navajo women out in the community doing what you can. Just hearing a little bit of your stories is exciting. I know that’s the work that you’re doing.”

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