

Word on Washington

by Rep. Mike McIntyre

It was a classic case of bureaucratic red tape gone awry - a threat not only to the survival of Lumberton Family Medical Center, but also to the health of rural America. I was faced with a situation that was about to jeopardize the future of Earl Cummings and the vital care he provides to so many local families! I knew what had to be done. Fighting for a local medical center would mean victory not only for him and for us in Robeson County, but also for rural health clinics across America!

Knowing this, I arranged a meeting with Medicare officials and asked them how they proposed to resolve this situation that was endangering access to care in rural communities. Without a doubt, the law was on the side of Mr. Cummings and other physician assistants like him who own rural clinics. By confronting this matter head-on, we were able to break through the bureaucratic red tape threatening the health of rural residents everywhere.

Since opening its doors to the public in 1989, Lumberton Family Medical Center has provided important services to the residents of Robeson County. Like other rural health clinics, this medical center has striven to improve access to quality, cost-effective care in a rural community. The success of the rural health clinic program, as illustrated by the fact there are approximately 3,500 of these important facilities located

across the country, all of which are critical to bringing care to rural, underserved communities.

Until this year, Lumberton Family Medical Center has been reimbursed for basic lab services for Medicare patients. However, as of January 1, 2001, Medicare would no longer pay for these services at the clinic because it refused to recognize physician assistants as the owners of rural health clinics. In fact, Mr. Cummings had been clearly recognized as the co-owner of Lumberton Family Medical Center with Dr. Ben Hardin for more than a decade by Medicare. Yet, the bureaucracy within the Medicare program was not responsible for hindering the delivery of care in Robeson County and other rural communities due to a regulatory error on its part. By resolving this situation, we were able to allay a crisis that imperiled access to rural health services nationwide.

This meant good news not only for Mr. Cummings and the resident of Robeson County but also for all individuals living in rural communities. By defending access to services at rural health clinics owned by physician assistants, we have protected the interests and well being of all of rural America. As Co-Chairman of the Rural Health Care Coalition, I will continue to do all I can to give voice to the health care concerns and needs of rural residents everywhere. Mr. Cummings' victory has become a national victory!

Reflections

by Alta Nye Oxendine

BLACKFEET MEMORIES (Continued) CHIEF BULL

Another special memory is that of Chief Bull, whose other name was Richard "Dick" Sanderville. (One grandfather had been a Spanish fur trader.) He was the oldest chief at the time, and (I was told) was the political head of the tribe, even though each "society" had its own chief or chieftain and there was a tribal council. Dick had attended Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, and had met a number of U. S. presidents. He was called the "world's authority on Indian sign language" and was also able to do picture writing, to illustrate tribal members' names, for example.

One day he shared with me the Creation Story his grandmother had told him when he was a child. (I am so sorry I did not write it down. About all I can remember now is that there was a very important river in the story, perhaps the origin of this world.)

Dick also taught me a brief segment of Indian sign language, which children like my son Donny have enjoyed learning during the intervening years since I left Montana. AND, at the Montana Methodist Church's Annual Conference in Livingston in June, 1950, "Chief Bull" unofficially "took me into" The Blackfeet tribe, giving me the name of Pocahontas mother, he said. It sounded to me like "Princess Cross Shy."

(Even after living all these years near Pocahontas' homeland, now Virginia, I have never managed to learn much more about this Indian woman and her name.)

IF ANYONE KNOWS HER NAME, PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH ME. THROUGH THE CAROLINA INDIAN VOICE! Thank you!!!

It was Annie Sanderville, Dick's wife, who lent me one of her buckskin dresses to wear at that Annual Conference session. "My" hot buckskin clothing matched that of both Dick and Annie Sanderville. To my surprise, I was called to the front while wearing "my" thick Blackfeet outfit. (Others had something special in mind when I was told to wear that traditional Blackfeet dress.) Dick (Chief Bull) a lay delegate to the conference, also came up, and soon began a ritual to take me into the Blackfeet tribe. Afterward he promised to make and present me with a muskrat skin "plaque" bearing my new Indian name. But he died the next winter before getting it made. (A disappointment to me.)

Although the "preacher" was away when 80-something Dick died, Mrs. Smith, Bernice Jackson, and I were in the hospital room with him and his wife when he requested that we sing his favorite hymn, "He Leadeth me", an appropriate hymn to remind us that we have someone to guide us out of this earthly life.

Shortly after coming to Pembroke five years later, I was attending Old Prospect church when "Mr. Johnnie" Bullard asked the congregation to sing that same song. "How much we all have in common in various places across this country," I thought, as I stood to sing. In fact, even now when I sing that song I automatically think of both Dick Sanderville and "Mr. Johnnie" Bullard!

Although I never mastered the art of Blackfeet beadwork, it was Annie Sanderville who showed me that two threaded needles were used to string the tiny beads on one thread, and tack them down (every so often with the other. I still treasure the few pieces of Blackfeet beadwork left after my young children enjoyed playing with them. (Perhaps it's no wonder that Donny thought I was the REAL Indian" of the family, since I was the parent with some genuine beadwork, who also knew a little Indian sign language.)

One other thing I would have loved to take with me when I left the reservation to do graduate study in rural work, was a pair of beautiful Blackfeet moccasins.

But, no my beginner's salary, there was no way I could buy anything nonessential. And, by the time the Blackfeet women had turned their moccasins over to the white operators of the tourist "store" at the interesting, historical Plains Museum located at Browning, those same moccasins were WAY too expensive for anyone but a "wellheeled" visitor to buy.

As a girl who grew up in the Rockies, I still enjoy picturing in my mind the simple, yet stately, MOUNTAIN design the Blackfeet women used for nearly all their beadwork!

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