

Students urged to pursue health careers

by Roselynn Cacy
for the Tundra Times

"We really do need Native professionals," Dr. Barbara Riley, a physician, told a group of students at the Alaska Native Health Career Workshop earlier this month.

Dr. MaryAnne Navitsky, a dentist, agreed. "There is no glut of Alaska Native professionals in any field," she said. "Cultivate your strength in what you like to do."

Also urging the students to pursue health careers was Dr. H.D. Fredenburg, who practices dentistry in Anchorage. Nearly 60 percent of his clientele is from rural Alaska. He said he sees no decline in the need or demand for dental services in Alaska.

"As the awareness of the value of good dental hygiene and care in Alaska has increased, so has the demand for dental services," he said.

Fredenburg spoke of his own entry into the field of dentistry. He told of listening to Dr. George Bluespruce, the first American Indian dentist, nearly 20 years ago and being inspired to try himself.

He discussed how, as a young Menominee Indian from Wisconsin, he drove 200 miles to his interview for dental school, had difficulty finding where he was supposed to go, took an IQ test and had several interviews.

The last interviewer told him he had "10 books in his office on the American Indian." Fredenburg's reply was that he had "10 books in his home on the White Man." The interview ended, and he drove home, believing he had lost his chance.

Several weeks later, however, the same interviewer sent him his accep-



Dr. Barbara Riley, left, and Dr. MaryAnne Navitsky encouraged students to pursue health careers. photo by Bobbi Fillmore

tance notification. He was accepted into dental school.

Riley and Navitsky spent the day of the workshop with the health career students. The Alaska Native Health Career Program coordinated a potlatch with the Anchorage Community College Student Orientation Services and the University of Alaska Native Services for the students and health professionals.

Riley pointed out that while in school she often walked a thin line between two cultures. But she discovered that her own Eskimo/Aleut culture was only on the "back burner" sometimes and it was still there when she com-

pleted school. She said having an Eskimo roommate in undergraduate school really helped.

Riley works part-time at the Kanakanak Hospital in Dillingham and full time as a wife and mother.

The Bristol Bay Health Corp. now has a new facility in Dillingham with about 135 employees. Of these, about 30 are Alaska Natives, and they hope to have more. The three Native American physicians include Riley; her husband, Dr. Richard Asher, a Cherokee Indian; and Dr. Ronald Livermont, a Sioux Indian.

Navitsky, a Tlingit/Haida Indian from Sitka, graduated from the

University of Iowa College of Dentistry. While there, she participated in an exchange program between the University of Iowa and the Royal College of Dentistry in Aarhus, Denmark, observing dental programs in Denmark and Greenland.

Navitsky encouraged the students to view everything as steps forward.

"If you apply and get turned down, find out why. Then use that knowledge," she said.

The Health Career Workshop was held in the Campus Center at the University of Alaska and sponsored by the Alaska Native Health Career Program.