3,000 EXAMINATION MARK SURPASSED

By the end of February two of the three field centers had crossed the 1,000 examination level, and the total for the Strong Heart Study has risen to 3055 for the three centers combined. More specifically, Oklahoma leads the group with a total of 1087. The Arizona center has put on a torrid pace in 1991 with 81 examinations completed in January and 65 in February to reach a total of 1032. The South Dakota center has been trying very hard to catch up but still remains below 1,000 with a total of 936.

The field centers continue to deal with day-to-day successes and failures with a positive attitude and great resourcefulness. When use of the IHS clinic for Saturday examinations was not possible in Anadarko, Oklahoma but was needed to accommodate working participants, Martha Stoddart and Karen Langilotti took the creative approach. They found the goodwill of the Anadarko Municipal Hospital available to provide sufficient clinic space for Saturday examinations. In Arizona, discussions between NIDDK staff and Strong Heart Study staff revealed the community of Ak-Chin belonged in the study population. (See the accompanying article in this issue.)

The community has proven to be incredibly cooperative and an inspiration in the effort to achieve record monthly examinations. In South Dakota, difficult recruiting, the loss of a nurse who has not yet been replaced in Eagle Butte, and a call to active duty of Pauletta Red Willow in Pine Ridge, has slowed the process. Dr. Welty has responded by identifying several medical students for the summer and fall to work in Pine Ridge and other clinics to make up the gap.

Among the most satisfying experiences of staff are the many positive responses from community members, from those who have participated in the study as well as those who are not eligible but can see the positive effects from the outside. The new President of the Salt River Indian Community, Mr. Ivan Makil, is just one example. He noted that, although he was not eligible for the study, he could see the value of it in the community. It has increased health awareness among community members and created a desire to improve the quality of life in SRIC. Strong Heart Study staff can be proud of their accomplishments to date in knowing that, even at this early time in the process, the efforts are being recognized.

NHLBI SEeks EXPANSION OF THE STRONG HEART STUDY

The National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute has proposed an expansion of the Strong Heart Study for a second examination. Following approval from the NHLBI Advisory Council and approval for release by the Director, NHLBI requested proposals from the currently funded centers for a five-year extension. NHLBI requested that the extension include ongoing surveillance of the incidence of heart disease in the Indian communities and the addition of a second examination that will also include pulmonary function tests and echocardiography.

A second examination after a four-year period will provide a measure of the change in risk factors over time. In addition, ongoing surveillance of heart disease will allow investigators to more easily document the occurrence of heart disease and relate it back to the examination data collected prior to disease occurrence. This approach provides a more powerful assessment of what factors are related to heart disease in Indian people.

Pulmonary function tests require the subject to blow into a hose connected to air collection
equipment and a computer. This procedure assesses lung function by measurements of how much air can be taken into the lungs with a deep breath and how quickly it can be blown out. Echocardiography is a painless way to view the structure and functioning of the heart using sound waves. Like an electrocardiogram there is no discomfort to the subject. Unlike an electrocardiogram, echocardiography provides a picture of the heart that can be seen by the subject as well as evaluated by a cardiologist. Both pulmonary function testing and echocardiography will represent additional measures of the health of Strong Heart Study participants that are not readily available in general clinical care. The advantage of including the results of these tests as part of future medical care reemphasizes the value of participating in the current study.

Expansion of the Strong Heart Study has been a mixed blessing for the investigators and staff. It is exciting and a real boost to morale to realize that the scientific community recognizes the value of our efforts. On the other hand, the investigators and staff were already very busy with examinations and other data collection, trying to meet or exceed goals for the initial phase of the Strong Heart Study. In spite of the required demands, the proposals for extension were delivered by the February 1, 1991 deadline. The next step will be committee review on April 11, 1991.

Richard Fabsitz, Strong Heart Study Project Manager for NHLBI, indicated that “this extension is a vote of confidence for the current project, the investigators and staff, and the Indian people. NHLBI has recognized the potential contributions of the Strong Heart Study to heart disease research and to the health of the Indian people as well as the general public. I hope that the initial success we have established will grow bigger and better with time.”

STRONG HEART STUDY EXPANDS TO INCLUDE AK-CHIN INDIAN COMMUNITY

The Ak-Chin Community consists of both Papago and Pima Indians and is located approximately 30 miles southwest of Phoenix, Arizona. There are 547 members in this community, and approximately 50 people are eligible to participate in the Strong Heart Study. The Steering Committee of the Study decided to include this community in the population being followed, because of the close genetic link between the Pima and Papago Indians.

The Ak-Chin Indian Community has rightfully been recognized for their achievement in successfully reclaiming their farmland from the BIA and negotiating a water settlement agreement with the Department of Interior. Because of the tribe’s agricultural achievements, the Ak-Chin Community is one of the model programs being hailed nationwide. (See Reader’s Digest, “Comeback In Indian Country”, October 1989). The Ak-Chin Farms Enterprise, with its innovative modern use of laser equipment and water conservation techniques, is being copied across the nation. The profits from their farms were greater than $1.5 million in 1989.

With a job available for every tribal member, the Ak-Chin community has reduced its unemployment rate to only 10 people, or 3.5% of the labor force. This tribe has gone from living in huts made out of railroad ties and mud, without electricity and running water, to nearly everyone living in a modern home; they also have risen from poverty level to achieve a goal of being 98% self-sufficient. The community also has a meat packing industry, a grain storage company and a satellite shop for a private tractor equipment company. They are constructing the first Eco-Museum to be built in the United States and will complete construction on a new complex for the elderly this year.

The Strong Heart Study visits the Ak-Chin Community to conduct physical exams either on Mondays or Fridays. These exams are done in a mobile home, which also provides temporary services for the elderly. The staff consists of Betty Jarvis, RN, Paula Harper, RN, Inez Heath, RN, Rosinna Briones, and Wendolyn Johnson. All of these staff members, with the exception of Inez Heath, have been featured in a previous newsletter. Inez Heath, RN, a recent new employee of the...
project, has been hired to assist with the exams and the mortality review. She worked for nine years with Native Americans in Alaska, which gave her some rich background experience. Currently, she is pursuing a Masters Degree in Business at the University of Phoenix.

In addition to the regular staff, other people who have contributed to the success of the SHS in Ak-Chin include Delia Carlyle, tribal chairman, Fius Gross, Public Health Nurse, Virgil Lewis, driver and recruiter, and Vera Antone, service center coordinator.

STRONG HEART STUDY EMPLOYEES AND IHS EMPLOYEES ASSISTING THE STUDY CALLED UP TO SERVE DURING OPERATION DESERT STORM

Several IHS and Strong Heart Study staff members who are affiliated with the National Guard and/or Reserves have been called up to serve their country during this crisis in the Gulf. They will be missed, and we wish them all safe journey and safe return.

Paulette Red Willow, a pre-medical student at the Oglala Lakota College, has been working on the Strong Heart Study since it began in April of 1989. Since she began working, she was married to George Eoffey and delivered a baby girl Amanda Jane in November 1990. In spite of resigning from the National Guard in summer 1990, she was subject to recall and received her orders to report to active duty in January 1991. She is currently serving as a medic stateside at Fitzsimons Army Medical Center in Denver, Colorado. Her husband and baby will be able to join her in Denver.

Alberto Angles, M.D., Chief of Surgery at the PIHS Indian Hospital in Lawton, Oklahoma, is currently serving at Shaw Air Force Base in South Carolina, temporarily replacing a surgeon who was deployed to Saudi Arabia. This is the second time Dr. Angles has been activated during Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm, and he expects to return to Lawton in June 1991.

Ralph Kealey, Jr., P.A., Facility Unit Director at the Carnegie Indian Health Clinic, Oklahoma, was deployed to the Persian Gulf on January 7, 1991, and will serve as the unit commander of the 44th Evac Hospital, a 400-bed facility about 25 miles from the Kuwait-Iraqi border, for about three more months. His wife Martha and three daughters Traci, Melanie, and Kelcey and all of his friends and co-workers look forward to his safe return to Mountain View.

DANCES WITH WOLVES PREMIERS IN RAPID CITY

On November 12, 1990, the premier showing of Dances with Wolves was held in Rapid City with Michael Blake, Producer, and Kevin Costner’s parents in attendance, as well as the Governor of South Dakota and many of the Indian cast. This movie won several Oscar nominations recently and was filmed entirely in South Dakota. It is a very accurate portrayal of the traditional way of life of the Sioux. It is hoped that the movie will help in the recruitment of health care professionals, since the Dakotas have always had severe problems in recruitment and retention of health care professionals who serve Indian people. Everyone is recommended to see this movie to get an idea of the geography of the Dakotas and the culture of the Sioux people who are participating in the Strong Heart Study.

1990 - YEAR OF RECONCILIATION IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Governor George Mickelson of South Dakota declared 1990 as the Year of Reconciliation between whites and Indians in the state. This declaration was made in commemoration of the Wounded Knee Massacre, December 29, 1890, the last armed conflict between the U.S. Calvary and Indian people in this country. Some progress was made in improving race relations in the state, and the Governor declared a century of reconciliation to follow so
that the progress of 1990 can be continued. We hope that the socioeconomic status of South Dakota Indians will gradually improve through such cooperative efforts and that subsequently the health status will also improve.

NEW STUDENT ASSISTANTS IN OKLAHOMA

A number of students have been working on the Strong Heart Study since 1989. They have made significant contributions in many different ways and learned first-hand knowledge about epidemiological research.

In Oklahoma, two of the three original recipients of the NHLBI minority student research supplemental grant, Ronald Tso and Faith Jacob, completed their Masters degrees in Public Health. Ron received his M.P.H. degree in Health Administration and was awarded the Outstanding Indian Student Award. A Navajo from Arizona, he was anxious to serve his people after graduation. His dream came true when he was appointed the Service Unit Director of the IHS Health Center at Keyenta, Arizona. Faith graduated last summer with an M.P.H. in Social Science and Health Behavior. She stayed with the Strong Heart Study for a short period of time and is now considering several job options. We wish Ron and Faith the best of luck and successful careers.

Two graduate students of the College of Public Health at the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center have been recruited to replace Ron and Faith. They are Margie Deer and Judy Aaron. Margie is a Masters student in the Department of Social Science and Health Behavior. A Wichita-Caddo Indian originally from the Anadarko area, Margie has a Bachelor's degree in business from Oklahoma City University. She worked as an interviewer on the dietary survey of the Strong Heart Study through a scholarship program of the IHS in the summer of 1990. She is familiar with the Study and will assist in recruitment and record-keeping.

Judy Aaron will help in data updating and management. She is pursuing an M.S. in Health Administration. She has a B.S. degree in chemistry from Southeastern Oklahoma State University and plans to attend medical school after receiving her M.S. She hopes to work in an IHS clinic in the future. Originally from Idabel, Oklahoma, Judy is half Choctaw and half Creek. Presently, she resides in Bethany, Oklahoma with her husband, Mitchell. Her other interests are painting and sports.

The Strong Heart Study welcomes Margie and Judy. It is hoped that they will enjoy the experience and further develop research interest in the area of Indian health.

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