A Physician Assistant Gives Back to the Poverty-Stricken Community She Grew Up In

Revina Talker, PA, is doing what she has always dreamed of: giving back. That is to say that she is providing valuable health care services to an underserved community, which is also the one she grew up in.

The physician assistant was raised on the Navajo Reservation in New Mexico, where she would visit the community clinic with her grandfather. As her interest in medicine grew, she clued in on a problem, even at a young age. "I always realized that there was a discrepancy between what the English-speaking doctor would say and what my grandfather, who only speaks in the Navajo tongue, thought the doctor said," Talker says. "Needless to say, this can be problematic: there's a gap between the care being provided and the patient's expectations."

Talker decided to be the solution to this problem.

She left the reservation in high school to take part in the Indian Student Placement Program, run by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. She then earned her bachelor's degree at BYU. Talker, a first generation college graduate, went on to enroll in the University Physician Assistant Program (UPAP), because she noticed the program focused on providing primary care in communities like hers. In the back of her mind, she knew that she'd go back to the reservation.

One of the oldest PA programs in the country, UPAP is committed to training PAs to meet the challenges of providing high quality care in medically underserved and rural communities. "I knew the U had a great medical science program, but when I read the UPAP mission, I knew that they would support me in my goals," Talker says. Read more about the program.

In the UPAP, students can choose where to do their two clinical rotations, and Talker was able to set up both of hers on the Navajo reservation--first at the Inscription House in Arizona, then at the Montezuma Creek Clinic, where she continues to work.

When Talker describes the type of poverty on the reservation, it's eye opening. Many homes that she visits outside of the clinic have no running water or electricity. These factors help determine the treatment plans she gives patients. But she is able to provide great care because of her expertise and because of her ability to speak the native language.

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The other rewarding part of her job is her work as a preceptor with UPAP students. Talker began working at Montezuma full time in 2008, and by 2009, she started precepting students. In total, she has facilitated 12 rotations for students. "Professors talk about challenges in class, but when the students see it first hand, it really has a lot more impact on their education," Talker says. "And I'm really happy to be a part of that."

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