



MAA Quarterly, Summer 2014

Holland Leon, M.D. '99 is a board-certified family practice physician and the medical director at the American Indian Health & Services in Santa Barbara, Calif. She has worked with the Native American community and medically underserved population of Santa Barbara for more than 10 years. In 2007, she served as executive director and medical director during a transition phase of the clinic. Since then, the clinic has expanded from two providers to more than 13 healthcare professionals, including those in family practice, pediatrics, dentistry, mental health and endocrinology. The clinic serves Native Americans and non-Native Americans. Dr. Leon currently lives in Santa Barbara with her husband, two sons, ages 3 and 5, and her fun-loving dog.



Photo: DeSanti Photography

My interest in working with the medically underserved population began with my involvement with the Flying Samaritans at the University of California, Irvine during my undergraduate years. Over the course of my medical education at UCLA, I was involved in externships that sent me to various rural areas, including Yelapa, Mexico. I then took it a step further and decided to take a year off from medical school to explore different parts of the world and work on a project with Dr. Patrick Dowling on Health Professional Shortage Areas in Los Angeles. These experiences showed me that even though there is a huge medical need in other countries, sometimes the medical need is greatest in our own backyard.

During my residency at White Memorial Medical Center, Los Angeles, I decided to set up a rotation at the American Indian Health & Services. I was very excited to be offered a position when I completed my residency and so my journey began in Native American health. Since I enjoyed working with an underserved population, this was a natural progression for me. Working with the Native American population has taught me a lot about patient care and treating patients respectfully by addressing their physical, social, emotional and spiritual well being. We have a very busy clinic that serves a high-risk population with complicated medical and socioeconomic issues. Most of our patients are uninsured, or have Medi-Cal or Medicare. Even though we are a small clinic, we are working on becoming a patient-centered medical home and are into our fourth year of electronic health records. We are very involved with the community and have a Clinic on Wheels that is used for health fairs and events. Our clinic is considered a model for many of the federally qualified health centers and urban Native American clinics. We have a great team of providers who all have the same passion to provide quality healthcare for our patients in the community.