



## **Student Newsletter**

### **Spring 2015**

#### **Navajo Cancer Symposium: A Student Perspective**

By Jackie Brown

My experience at the Navajo Cancer Symposium was positive. I learned that there could be a lot of disconnect between western medicine and the views of American Indians and how to treat illness, especially cancer. Spirituality was mentioned frequently throughout the Navajo Cancer Symposium. It was nice to be able to hear the commonalities of paying homage to ancestors in the Navajo culture and being able to compare them to my own (African American). This symposium was beneficial to those that have recently lost a loved one or is acting as a caregiver to a loved one with cancer. The panel speakers were able to speak on their experiences of what it was like having to tell an elder (often times mom or dad) that they had cancer, sometimes not telling elders that they were taking chemotherapy treatments, and being provided hospice care that catered to cultural views (often times not).



*Student Intern Jackie Brown.*

Through the Navajo Cancer Symposium I learned that there is not a lot of support for those that may live in rural areas of the Navajo Reservation. Cancer can be a financial burden to anyone that may be experiencing it, especially to those where resources are sparse and cultural views can sometimes prevent people from receiving treatment. I also learned that the jurisdiction of the State and Navajo Nation can become blurred, people needing treatment can fall in between Arizona and Navajo lines, making it unclear as to which party

is responsible for treatment resources. I felt that some of the doctors that spoke at the symposium presented heavily on medications and did not speak on their experiences on working with American Indian people and steps they have taken to be more accommodating to cultural views. I was able to learn about the physiological effects of medications like Morphine and what to do to help ease the discomfort sometimes associated with taking it.

Attending this symposium was validation for me to continue with my goals of becoming a public health worker. I learned that it is important to know the population that I may be working with in the future and to also get to know the politics behind health and health decisions made. This symposium has sparked my interest in health policy and what I can do to help people get the resources that they need, in order to be able to make important decisions with confidence.