

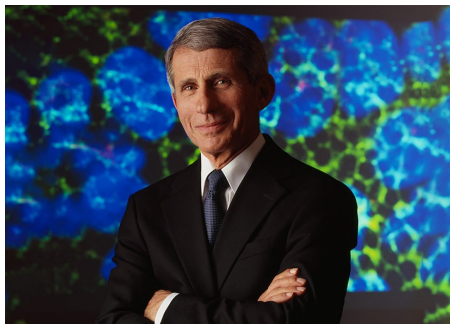
# Strong Heart Study Newsletter

Investigating Cardiovascular Disease in American Indians  
Updates for Community Members and Strong Heart Study Participants

Volume 31, Issue 1 Summer 2021

## PROTECT COMMUNITIES FROM COVID-19 AND INFLUENZA THROUGH EXPERT CONSULTATION AND RESEARCH

The Strong Heart Study (SHS) was very fortunate to have Dr. Anthony Fauci, one of the world's leaders in infectious diseases, join

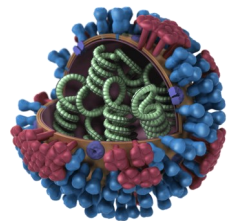


a conference call with Tribal leaders from the Dakota Center on 12/14/20. There were many questions about how his government agency can help communities prevent COVID-19 spread and about the safety of new vaccines.

The last newsletter mentioned that the SHS has teamed up with 13 other similar studies to collect information on how COVID-19 spreads and causes such severe illness in many. This "C4R" study has obtained all Tribal and other approvals and is collecting interview information. Soon, SHS participants will be asked for additional information and a finger prick blood

sample. Future newsletters will have more information.

Although everyone is now focused on the severe impact of COVID-19, some SHS investigators have been preparing proposals to invite SHS participants and other Tribal members to take part in research on influenza (the "flu" bug). **This disease is not as serious as COVID-19 but it still has killed about 50-60,000 Americans each year.** A very bad influenza pandemic in 1918 was worse than our current COVID-19 pandemic so far. While there is high hope that the COVID-19 vaccine will give lasting protection, scientists have been unable to make an influenza vaccine that continues to work effectively year after year. **The new proposals for SHS influenza research aim to help make better vaccines for this important disease.** These proposals WOULD NOT take away anyone's choice of having the vaccine or not; and are being developed in cooperation with Tribal leaders.

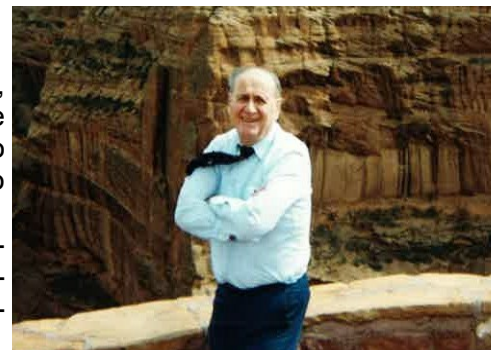


## DR. EVERETT RHOADES, AN INDIAN HEALTH CHAMPION

**Dr. Everett R. Rhoades retired** from the Strong Heart Study (SHS) at the end of December, 2020. We celebrate his retirement and his monumental achievements in improving Indian health with much respect, admiration, affection and gratitude. Dr. Rhoades is the first Kiowa to receive a medical doctoral degree. According to an interview he had with an Oklahoma news media, his interest in medicine was greatly influenced by his grandfather, a physician who came from Connecticut to the Kiowa, Comanche and Apache reservation in about 1892 and married his Kiowa grandmother.

Following medical education and training at the University of Oklahoma College of Medicine, Dr. Rhoades served in the Air Force at Wilford Hall US Air Force Hospital at Lackland Air Force Base in Texas, and established the Infectious

Diseases Section. Then, in 1966, he returned to OUHSC to establish the Infectious Diseases Section.



He was appointed as a **public health officer (Director of Indian Health Service (IHS))** in 1982, a position he held until 1993. **He was the first American Indian to hold this position.** He immediately realized the insufficient resources IHS had and became a cheerleader for the agency. During his 11-year tenure, the

IHS budget tripled, from \$617 million to \$1.85 billion, significantly improving services to American Indians and Alaska Natives.

When Dr. Rhoades was in medical school in the early 1950s, there were very few American Indians in college, let alone medical school. He and then Director of IHS, Dr. Emery Johnson, discussed the need to recruit more American Indians into the health field and the need for more mutual support among them. *The discussion led to the establishment of the Association of American Indian Physicians (AAIP) in 1971.* It began with 15 members but has become a major professional organization now with over 400 members.

Dr. Rhoades has *persistently advocated for the Lawton Indian Hospital*, the first Indian Hospital in Oklahoma. It serves the Lawton-Fort Sill-Anadarko area where the seven SHS participating tribes reside. Dr. Rhoades has worked tirelessly to improve and expand the hospital's services, and it is now a full-service hospital with 100,000 outpatients and more than 800 admissions per year.

In the late 1960's, Dr. Rhoades joined a group of volunteers to address the issue of inadequate health services for urban Indians. After years of hard work including serving as a volunteer physician, *Dr. Rhoades and friends opened the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic in 1974.* He continued to help shape the clinic; it has become one of the *largest health facilities for urban Indians in the United States.*



*United States.*

On August 15, 2014, the Oklahoma City Indian Clinic dedicated a new 3-story building to Dr. Rhoades in honor of his profound impact



The Everett R. Rhoades M.D. Medical Building

on Indian health not only in Oklahoma but nationwide. This beautiful new building was named *The Everett R. Rhoades M.D. Medical Building.*

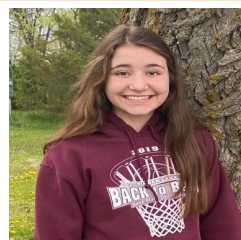
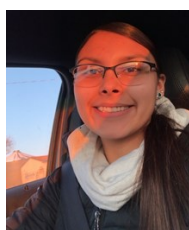
The SHS has been fortunate to have Dr. Rhoades as its senior consultant after he returned to Oklahoma. He reinforced the good working relationships between the SHS and the Oklahoma tribes as well as IHS, presented research proposals and manuscripts to the Health Board, reviewed medical records for the entire study and participated in various study activities. Above all, he shared with us his vast medical knowledge and experience, and he has *continuously helped investigators to respect the cultural traditions, history, and values of the SHS participants.*

In 2012, Dr. Rhoades was honored with the *Jack B. McConnell Excellence in Medicine for Volunteerism Award* by the American Medical Association for his significant community service and dedication to improving health care for the American Indian people.

Having achieved so much as a physician, administrator, teacher, researcher, and having helped so many people, Indians and non-Indians, Dr. Rhoades remains kind and modest. He praises others readily but never brags about himself. He is indeed a role model for all of us. We will miss him dearly. Please join the SHS in wishing Dr. Rhoades and his family good health and much happiness in the years to come.

## SUCCESS STORIES OF HIGH SCHOOL INTERNS

**A'dyn Moran, Intern.** A'dyn is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and a high school student. As an intern, she learned about the Strong Heart Study and other health research projects. A'dyn liked working at Missouri Breaks because she enjoyed learning from other staff about the various research projects and how the research was helping people from her community and beyond. The favorite thing she worked on was the Windshield Survey that she helped design and conduct. The Windshield Survey focused on COVID 19 and safety precautions.



**Natalie Gross, Intern.** Natalie is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe and a high school student. In the summer of 2018, Natalie participated in the summer camp Indians into Medicine (INMED) at the University of North Dakota. This allowed her to gain more insight to the medical field. As an intern at Missouri Breaks, Natalie learned about the Strong Heart Study and how local research helps others, and assisted with community engagement efforts. She helped design and conduct a Windshield Survey focused on COVID 19 and safety precautions.



## MYTHS OR FACTS ABOUT THE COVID VACCINE

### **MYTH: Getting the vaccine will give you COVID.**

**FACT:** This is absolutely false. To become ill with COVID, there must be contact with the coronavirus. None of the vaccines available contain coronaviruses so they don't have what is needed to cause infection. Building up immunity takes time and so it is possible to contract the virus either before you get the vaccine or while your body is still building protection from the vaccine. That's why wearing a mask is so important.

### **MYTH: You don't need a vaccine if you've had COVID.**

**FACT:** We don't know how long immunity lasts once you recover from the virus, but there is a possibility of catching the virus a second time, so the vaccine is still important. If you've had COVID, you may receive the vaccine after your symptoms have gone away and you have finished your isolation period. If you received certain medicines when you had COVID, you may need to wait to be vaccinated. Talk to your provider about what's right for you.

### **MYTH: The vaccine will change my DNA.**

**FACT:** Your DNA is the blueprint for your body and is very difficult to change. The Pfizer and Moderna vaccines contain a different type of genetic material called messenger RNA, or mRNA. Your cells break down the mRNA after a short period of time. And mRNA does not affect or interact with your DNA in any way.

### **MYTH: I can't get the vaccine if I want to have a baby.**

**FACT:** There is no evidence the vaccine does anything to a baby during pregnancy, nor that it does anything to the mother's body to prevent pregnancy in the future. For men, there is no evidence to suggest it affects the sperm or male reproductive organs either, meaning it won't prevent someone from becoming a father. Your provider can help answer any specific questions.

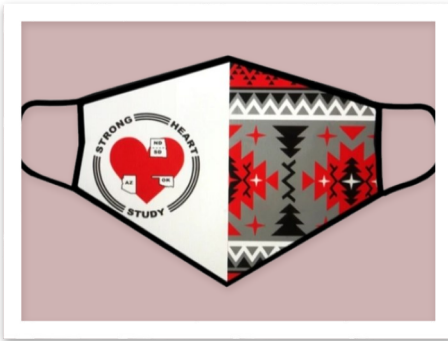


**Together, we can reach community immunity.**

Facts based on the CDC page [Myths and Facts about COVID-19 Vaccines](#).

For more information on vaccine safety, community supports, and continued protection against COVID, visit <https://www.ihs.gov/vaccine>

# OKLAHOMA STRONG HEART STUDY MASK DISTRIBUTION



COVID-19 has been disproportionately affecting American Indian communities. According to the recent information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, American Indian are 1.9 times more likely to contract COVID-19, 3.7 times more likely to be hospitalized due to COVID-19, and 2.4 times more likely to die from COVID-19 compared to white people. These disparities are the largest for any racial or ethnic group.

Underlying health conditions and limited access to health care are among the factors that have put American Indian at

higher risk for poor outcomes from COVID-19.

Recognizing the vulnerability of their communities, some American Indian tribes have been proactive in trying to contain the virus by implementing preventive measures, such as organizing COVID-19 vaccination drives; distributing face masks and hand sanitizers; and making public health announcements to emphasize mask-wearing and social distancing.

In the same spirit, the Strong Heart Study organized a face mask distribution campaign in the participating communities in Oklahoma. **The Oklahoma Strong Heart Study Center ordered face masks that were custom-designed to include Strong Heart Study logo and American Indian artwork.** About



900 of these face masks were distributed to the community members through two drive-through events.

The first drive-through event was held in Anadarko on January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021 in collaboration with the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes where the Strong Heart Study distributed face masks at this tribe's COVID-19 vaccination drive.

The second drive-through event was held at the Comanche Nation Tribal Complex on January 15<sup>th</sup> 2021. An announcements for these drive-through events were made on the Strong Heart Study Facebook page and also on the social media platforms of the partner tribes, including on the tribes' Facebook pages and mass texting services.

Some community members drove long distances to come to these drive-through events to get the Strong Heart Study face mask. The Oklahoma Strong Heart Study Center also collaborated with the participating tribes' elder nutrition programs, which provide free home delivered meals to elders, to home deliver face masks to the tribal elders.

**Community members expressed appreciation for this mask distribution campaign as the communities continue to fight the spread of COVID.**







The newest associate in the Arizona Field Center, **Wanda is Oglala Lakota and Lenape (Delaware Tribe of Indians) from northern Oklahoma.** She was born in Phoenix, Arizona as one half of a set of twin girls, but was raised in South Dakota and Montana.

Wanda is an experienced, highly skilled, administrative professional with over 18 years experience of providing comprehensive senior level executive support and office management, primarily in the engineering field. She is a student at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary pursuing a certificate in Theological Education in Emerging Ministries. Her goal is become a Pastor to lead the Native American Urban Ministry in Phoenix.

**Michaela, a member of the Navajo Nation (Dine'), is a part of the Many Goat Clan (Ti'izilani) born to the Red Running into the Water People Clan (Ta'chii'nii).** She is the second newest member of the Arizona team and works part time while attending the Nursing program at Phoenix College. She is in the CEP program at Phoenix College currently in her last semester and will then transfer to Northern Arizona University to finish her BSN as double Honors student.

Since January, she has been working under the training and supervision of Ditas Fallis in preparation to replace her upon retirement. Aside from work and school, Michaela has two little boys who keep her well occupied, 3 and 11 years old. Michaela loves to spend time with her sons.



## NEW TEAM MEMBERS



**Rae O'Leary, MPH, RN** Rae is a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. She conducts research and leads public health initiatives for Missouri Breaks in Eagle Butte, SD on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation. Many of the initiatives she works with support health needs found through Strong Heart Study research.

Rae earned a degree in Respiratory Therapy in 2006, degree in Nursing in 2012 and a Master of Public Health degree in Maternal Child Health in 2019 from the University of Minnesota. She has led the Canli (pronounced Chun-li) Coalition for the past 12 years, and it was her leadership that influenced the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Council to pass one of the strongest smoke-free air policies in Indian country. She also had the opportunity to testify to the U.S. Congress on the youth e-cigarette epidemic and JUUL's attempts to target Native people. Rae is currently working with other individuals and tobacco prevention coalitions in South Dakota so they can begin working to reduce tobacco harms in tribal communities.

**Torrie Eagle Staff, BA** Torrie graduated in December 2020 from Stanford University with a BA in Medical Anthropology. She joined Missouri Breaks in May 2020 as a new investigator with the Strong Heart Study looking into the holistic health effects on cardiovascular disease.

Torrie is an enrolled member of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe. Her father is Patrick Eagle Staff who is Miniconjou, Northern Arapaho, and Northern Cheyenne. Her mother is Charlotte Bad Cob who is Oglala Lakota.



Torrie grew up between Portland, Oregon, and South Dakota. She believes public health is part of an Indigenous way of life with the traditional teachings of holistic wellness. She began her career in public health within her own life by balancing prayer, sports, healthy eating, learning her own emotions, and managing academia.

STRONG HEART STUDY COORDINATING CENTER  
 University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center  
 Center for American Indian Health Research  
 College of Public Health  
 P.O. Box 26901  
 Oklahoma City, OK 73126-0901

Non-Profit Organization  
 U.S. Postage  
 PAID  
 Oklahoma City, Oklahoma  
 Permit No. 220

## TRIBAL COMMUNITY PILOT RESEARCH GRANT

The **STAR** (Strong Heart Tribal Approach to Research) **Project** has been launched recently.

### Goals of the STAR Project

- \* Support community-led research conducted by, for, and with the participation of community members.
- \* Build research skills and capacity in SHS communities.
- \* Enable community members to better understand health issues and needs.
- \* Empower them to assess community needs, prioritize those needs **according to their own value systems, and arrive at solutions on their own terms at times of their own choosing.**

### Who are eligible?

- \* Any members from one of the SHS Tribal partners .
- \* Any applicant/organization whose research would benefit the SHS Partner Tribes.
- \* Community members, college students, and Tribal and other organizations serving the SHS communities.

### Key dates

Grant Pre-Application Due	10/15/2021
Full Grant Application Due	12/15/2021
Notification of Funding Decision	By 2/1/2022
Grant Funding Period	5/1/2022 — 4/30/2023

### Funds available

- \* \$5,000 and up to a maximum of \$30,000 for each award.
- \* A total of \$110,000 per year to be awarded at each of the SHS centers in 2022 and 2023.

### Application assistance

- \* Webinars and zoom mentoring
- \* Continue to support awardees in the implementation of research projects.

For more information, please visit [strongheartstudy.org](http://strongheartstudy.org)

