



Indian Health Service
Winslow Service Unit
500 North Indiana Avenue
Winslow, AZ 86047
(928) 289-6176

Dear Doctor,

It has been a standard practice for the DSFC to accelerate the process for the provision of sanitation facilities to homeowners with a documented medical condition. The documentation of a medical condition is the “medical referral”, a letter signed by a medical doctor, which refers the patient to the DSFC and informs this office of a special need. A “medical condition” in this sense is a chronic condition, and does not include acute conditions such as viral infections, broken bones, or strained muscles. In today’s climate of environmental and historic regulatory requirements, acute conditions would be overcome before the facilities requested could clear all these requirements and be installed. As there are literally thousands of Navajo homes in need of these facilities, medical referrals must be confined to long term (lifetime) conditions.

Quite often, the medical referral participant’s home is very remote, far enough from existing water mains to make a connection to a community system economically, and sometimes physically, infeasible. In these instances a cistern system is the only remaining option to get potable water into the home.

A cistern is a 1,000-gallon, composite tank buried in the ground near the house. The water is pumped into the household plumbing by a pump installed inside the house. A drawback to this type of installation is that it requires someone to haul water from a safe source to regularly (generally weekly) re-fill the cistern. This requirement may place a large burden on an elderly, or physically infirm person unless a family or community member can commit to regularly and dependably performing this task. Another concern is that the source water used to re-fill the cistern will be at the option of the person performing this task. **There is the possibility that unregulated, even unsafe, sources might be exploited for the purposes of convenience and expense and each trip will be further possibility for contamination.** Lastly, maintenance of this system will eventually require the replacement of the pump, which can be a prohibitively expensive proposition for many of the Navajo Tribal members on the Reservation. Research indicates half of these systems are eventually abandoned, indicating a questionable use of limited program funds.

The intent of this letter, then, is to provide information to the medical staff of some of the difficulties which may be encountered by medical referral patients. We ask that the medical staff consider this information when providing medical referrals to patients, and, in some cases, even recommending other options to patients requesting referrals (e.g., move closer to a community where community water systems are available, requesting housing assistance from their communities & family members).

I appreciate your consideration of these salient points when considering a medical referral for the patients visiting the hospital. If you have any questions, please contact this office at (928) 289-6121.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lydell Yazzie".

Lydell Yazzie, P.E.
Supervisory Environmental Engineer
Winslow Service Unit, DSFC, OEHE
Navajo Area Indian Health Service