

## Richard Hatch Junior OD of the Year Award

Candidate Name: Erelida Gene, OD

Position Title: Acting Chief of Optometry

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Proposed citation:

Dr. Gene has played a vital role in Zuni IHS' numerous efforts to combat COVID in this past year. She has been a leader and active participant in our outdoor urgent care and drive through testing, COVID vaccine clinic, employee and patient screenings, and COVID hotline. There is no doubt that Dr. Gene's presence and leadership at our facility has allowed our COVID response to be as successful as it has been. She has taken on so many different roles, often in a supervisory capacity, and has proven herself to be an innovative, efficient, and well-loved leader by all. Through all of this, she has been an excellent Acting Chief of Optometry and continues to provide stellar optometric care to her patients. As her peer and co-laborer in many of these efforts, I whole-heartedly nominate Dr. Erelida Gene for the Richard Hatch Junior OD of the Year Award.

Recommended by: Iris Huang, OD

Submit to:

Regina Sullivan, OD, MPH, FAAO

*LT, U.S. Public Health Service*

*CDC OPAG Liaison and Awards Subcommittee Chair, Optometry Professional Advisory Group (OPAG)*

*Health Services Professional Advisory Committee (HSPAC)*

***Multidisciplinary in Approach, Connected by Service, Advancing Public Health***

*#WeAreCorpsSTRONG*

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# ERELDA GENE, O.D.

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## EDUCATION

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### **August 2013-May 2017**

Massachusetts of College Pharmacy and Health Sciences; Worcester, MA

- Doctor of Optometry
- GPA: 3.55

### **June 2009- May 2013**

Northern Arizona University; Flagstaff, AZ

- Bachelor of Science in Public Health, May 2012
- Overall GPA 3.60

## EXPERIENCE

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### **July 2018 – present**

Zuni Optometry Department

Zuni Comprehensive Health Care Facility, Zuni, NM

Acting Chief of Optometry: 01/2020 to present

- Supervise three staff optometrist, two technicians within the Optometry clinic. Manage and monitor the daily operation of the optometry department, patient flow and staffing. Develop employee performance plan for each optometry staff for the year 2020. This performance plan enables the individual to be graded on both quality and quantity of care and services they provide to the community.
- Provide monthly reports regarding the eye clinic personnel, annual training requirements, acquisitions and expense request, patient care related information, and department goals to the Hospital Executive Committee and Area Chief Clinical Consultant for Optometry staff.
- Overseeing the ocular disease residency program coordinator and perform annual evaluations.
- Direct the eye clinic approach to the COVID-19 pandemic with the following: Cancelling and postponing any non-urgent eye care problems but maintain open for any acute, vision threatening eye care problems that required treatment through mid-March to end of July and offering staff member for labor pool task as needed.
- Constructing the eye clinic's reopening plan to start providing in-person appointments by addressing the appropriate PPE needs for staff members, establishing cleaning protocols after each patient encounter, and planning visits based off acceptable patient capacity and social distance recommendations.
- Addressing complaints and concerns from community regarding the eye clinic and staff members and developing resolutions.

Clinical: 07/2018 to present

- Diagnosing and managing patient various retinopathy and neuropathy conditions with possible involvement of systemic conditions (vascular, inflammatory, high-risk medication use, etc.) as well as various forms of anterior segment conditions including

hereditary, inflammatory, infectious, trauma (including foreign body removal) & contact lens related.

- Educating patient about their ocular and systemic findings by interpreting their visual field results, optical coherence tomography scans, and fundus photos that illustrate their ocular structures specifically to layers of the retina, and recommended treatment options which includes prescribing topical or oral medication or referring to tertiary center as needed.
- Co-managing patient with vascular issues, commonly diabetic and hypertensive, with their primary care physician and retinal specialist in ordering appropriate MRI/CT scans and lab testing.
- Referring patients to appropriate specialist (retina, glaucoma, cornea, low vision, etc.) when identifying any of the following and co-managing following treatment plans
- Diagnosing and management patient with refractive and binocular issues such as vergences, accommodative, and fusion issues. Refracting and prescribing based on needs of the patient (correction, add power, prism, etc.).
- Provide on call services periodically and work with the urgent care medical providers in evaluating patient and treat as needed.

#### Labor Pool Co-coordinator: 4/2020 to present

- Assisted in developing the Labor Pool Credentialing form that identifies where employees are able to work based off of the individual's high risk factors in terms of age and medical conditions.
- Co-manage the following labor pool tasks/duties appropriately to those who were physically able to perform them. The following tasks were assigned.
  - Red and Green direct patient care: screeners and runners for zones to screen all individuals coming to the clinic and directing them based off any recent exposure or presentation symptoms related to the COVID-19 virus in order to keep hospital staff safe and healthy.
    - Helpers to set up the Tent City and Drive Thru zones on a daily basis so they are functioning prior to patients arriving for services.
  - Employee Health: screeners to screen all employees arriving to duty by asking if they have any new onset of symptoms to the COVID-19 virus and assessing their temperature before being allowed in the hospital after providing training.
  - Daily monitoring of COVID-19 positive community members: assistance needed in the Public Health Nurse Department with daily calls to the COVID-19 positive community members in evaluating symptoms, asking for additional exposures for contact tracing purposes, and release of quarantine guidelines.
- Co-orchestrated the drive thru testing site to allow mass swabbing to occur for the community especially prior to the traditional summer and winter ceremonials occurring as well as becoming one of the shift leaders that assist in reorganizing of drive thru/tent city situations based on weather/patient load and training fellow employees into positions needed.
- Participated as part of the labor pool member in working as a screener for both employee and direct patient care zones, provide daily calls to positive COVID-19 members, and managed the COVID-19 Zuni IHS hotline to answer questions or concerns about the virus, testing availability, and test result information.
- As of March 2021, supervising four temporary emergency hire medical support assistants in performing the duties such as the following:
  - Scanning documents into patient files from the drive thru and vaccination clinic

- Managing the vaccination clinics by hosting 'just in time' training, handling patient flow, and aiding patients with their forms.
- Aid medical records with scanning patient documents into their EHR chart.

#### Vaccination Co-coordinator: 12/2020 to present

- Aid in developing the COVID-19 vaccination clinic in order to provide vaccinations to Zuni IHS employees/essential workers and community members weekly pending on the number of vaccines allotted to the hospital.
  - Assist in setting up 3-8 vaccination booths that follow distance protocols and creating a course for individuals to follow.
  - Manage the number of available vaccinators during clinic hours to provide the injections.
  - Aid in scheduling appropriate amount of labor pool staff in managing the check in stations, flow, and check out after being monitored for fifteen minutes.
  - Co-orchestrated a drive-thru vaccination clinic available for community members who reside within the Zuni-Ramah service unit.

#### Education 08/2018 to present

- Involved in our residency program as a preceptor.
  - Guide resident through cases by reviewing findings, any additional test and scans results needed to filter through different diagnoses, classifying the most probable and developing a treatment plan.
  - Participate in grand rounds regarding interesting cases within the community.
- Facilitated several school vision screenings for the local head-start program and surrounding private schools in identifying any possible abnormality an individual may have that may hinder their learning capabilities and treat prior to it affecting their academic performance.

#### **July 2017- June 2018**

##### Family Practice & Ocular Disease Residency Program

Northeastern State University College of Optometry, Tahlequah, OK

#### Clinical

- Diagnosing and managing patient various retinopathy and neuropathy conditions with possible involvement of systemic conditions (vascular, inflammatory, high-risk medication use, etc.) as well as various forms of anterior segment conditions including hereditary, inflammatory, infectious, trauma (including foreign body removal) & contact lens related.
- Educating patient about their ocular and systemic findings by interpreting their visual field results, optical coherence tomography scans, and fundus photos that illustrate their ocular structures specifically to layers of the retina, and recommended treatment options which includes prescribing topical or oral medication or referring to tertiary center as needed.
- Ordering appropriate MRI/CT scans for possible systemic conditions that can affect the ocular health such as multiple sclerosis, cavernous sinus fistula, and pseudo-tumor cerebri.
- Referring patients to appropriate specialist when identifying any of the following and co-managing following treatment:
  - Retinal specialist (Severe to Proliferative Diabetic Retinopathy, Exudative Age-Related Macular Degeneration, Retinal holes, tears, and detachments, Suspicious choroidal or retinal finding, etc.)
  - Glaucoma specialist (POAG, PCAG, Neovascular glaucoma, Pigmentary glaucoma, etc.)

- Corneal specialist (infective ulcers, cataract extractions, trauma-related conditions)
- Prescribing several therapeutic pharmaceuticals- topical or oral- for the patient's present condition such as glaucoma medication for patient dealing with acute, complicated eye pressure spikes.
- Within the specialty care clinic, working under anterior segment minor procedures and laser treatment certification.
  - Performed various laser treatments: SLT, LPI for glaucoma patients and YAG for patients that developed posterior capsular opacifications that are visually significant following cataract surgery.
  - Performed minor procedures: lesion removals that are within the adnexa region, quickert suturing for those with symptomatic entropion, steroid injection treatment for chalazion)
- Performing on-call duty one week out of a month with the Hospital emergency/urgent care unit and co- managing with emergency care doctors on patients with a combination of systemic and acute ocular complication problems.
- Diagnosing and management adult and pediatric patient with binocular issues such as vergences, accommodative, and fusion issues. Refracting and prescribing based on needs of the patient (add power, prism)

### Education

- Supervising third and fourth years students in clinic and educating students in obtaining patient history
  - Guiding students on additional testing needed to filter through different diagnoses and classifying the most probable. Strategizing on each patient with developing treatment options and plan for their conditions.
- Involved and co-facilitated in several school screenings through fall and spring semesters with the first and second optometry students
  - Checked out students with quick recheck on abnormalities documented and referring as needed.
  - Educated students on their performances and tips on how to manage difficult scenarios.
- Participated in Clinical Methods Lecture and Lab
  - Help taught students entrance testing, slit lamp evaluations, tonometry, gonioscopy, punctal plug insertion/removal, contact lens insertion/removal, equipment used for direct and indirect evaluation of the posterior segment
  - Reviewed different scanning equipment and visual field analysis.
  - Mentored students in intravenous, intradermal, and intramuscular injection procedures
  - Lectured on topic of Dry Eye Management and Premium Intra-ocular lens to third year students.
- Mentored third and fourth year students on grand round cases and adding clinical pearls about each case.
- Participated in grand rounds
  - Grand round topics: Endogenous endophthalmitis secondary to sepsis of MRSA and Peripapillary vitreo-retinal traction.
  - Literature review topics related to identifying early diabetic retinopathy before it present and keratoconus surgical treatment

**January 2017- April 2017**

Indian Clinic, Oklahoma City, OK- Clinical rotation

- Provided primary care to patient that were 18 years or younger, 65 years or older, and patients that need ocular care (Glaucoma, Diabetes, etc.), with walk-ins emergencies
- Observed and helped with vision therapy and conducted vision therapy evaluations on children with binocular disorders that had accommodative, vergence, and fusion issues.

**Sept 2016- December 2016**

M&M Institute, Prescott, AZ- Clinical rotation

- Worked up patient and provided input on their management care to the preceptor prior to evaluating them.
- Observed a lot of cataract evaluation, macular degeneration, and glaucoma management care.
- Volunteered for vision screenings in Mexico and performed a number of prescriptions to those in need.

**May 2016- August 2016**

Veteran Medical Center, Cheyenne, WY- Clinical rotation

- Provided primary care to the veterans that were scheduled or walk-ins with conditions of glaucoma, hypertension, diabetes, and ocular prosthetics.
- Observed several cataract surgery and performed several post-operative follow ups.

**August 2014- May 2016**

Optometry Peer Mentor

Massachusetts of Pharmacy and Health Sciences University

- Held group and individual tutoring sessions for freshman optometry students.
- Assisted students in balancing time and priorities.
- Provided practice problems and questions and practice exams for students prior to upcoming exams.

**August 2011- May 2013**

Peer Mentor for the Native American Student Services Program

Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ

- Assisted incoming freshman and transfer students with transitioning into college life by being a resource and answering any questions they may have.
- Kept record of incoming individuals with academic goals. Developed programs for student to become more independent and reliable on oneself.
- Recruited future incoming freshman students to program by letting them know about current on-campus programs College of Health and Human Services
- Mentored other students into progressing into a mentoring position.
- Assisted Native American students in transitioning from a student to a leader in a work place.
- Researched how many programs at Northern Arizona University were geared to high school, undergraduate, and graduate students in aiding them in their future careers. Observed how smooth the transitioning phase for the students to enter the next level of education.

**August 2009- May 2013**

Research Assistant Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention

Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff, AZ

- Aided in a research project that aimed at discovering behavior risk factors the Hopi Tribe face on the reservation and aided in publication of research.
- Organized focus group sessions with scheduling time and date, preparing for meetings.
- Transcribed notes and develop most common risk factors that were brought up during sessions.
- Attended several conferences to gain knowledge about current health issues and research that are currently being done.
- Mentored other incoming research assistants about the project.

## PRESENTATIONS

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### Conferences Presentations

- Gene, E. (February 2018). Pieces of the Puzzle: A case report of endogenous endophthalmitis secondary to MRSA. Heart of America Conference, Kansas City, MO
- Gene, E. (February 2018). Grand Round Case: Peripapillary Vitreo-Retinal Traction. 5-State Symposium, Tahlequah, OK
- Gene, E., (June 2017). Corticosteroids and Immunosuppressant use in Juvenile Dermatomyositis. Optometry Meeting. Washington, D.C.
- Gene, E., Scranton, R., & Sanderson, P. (January 2013). Understanding Hopi Perspectives on Tobacco Use and Cancer through Focus Groups. The University of Arizona Undergraduate Biology Research Program (UBRP). Tucson, AZ
- Gene, E., Kee, T., Onsa, K., & Sekaumptewa, S. (July 2011). Communities as Partners in Cancer Education and Awareness. Pathfinder Summer Institute. Hosted by the Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention, Tucson, AZ.
- Gene, E. & Onsa, Kwaayesnom. (September 2011) 2010-2011 Hopi Survey of Cancer and Chronic Disease. The Partnership for Native American Cancer Prevention Annual Planning Retreat. Fort McDowell, Phoenix, AZ.
- Fogg-Leavette, D., Gene E., Kurley S., Savage M. (February 2011). Student Panel. Achieving Excellence, Harmony, and Balance Conference. Hosted by Pathways Into Health, Tucson, AZ.

## LICENSES/CERTIFICATIONS

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- Oklahoma State License: Date issued 7/18/2017, Expired 6/30/2021; Renewed annually
- Anterior Segment Laser Certification
- BLS for Healthcare Providers: Expires 10/2021

## HONORS/AWARDS

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### Northern Arizona University

- Student Award for the Cal Sicewa Award for diversity from the Commission for Native Americans
- Outstanding Graduate Student for the Health Science Department

## PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

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- Armed Forces Optometric Society – since 01/2020

### Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Science

- Beta Sigma Kappa member
- American Optometric Student Association member
- Student Volunteer Optometric Service to Humanity member



I am nominating Dr. Erelida Gene, OD, for the Richard Hatch Junior OD of the Year Award for not only her outstanding work as Acting Chief of Optometry so early in her career, but also for her numerous leadership efforts in Zuni IHS's response to COVID-19. She has taken on multiple roles this past year beyond her normal duties, and has been a key player in how successful our unit has been in adapting to COVID-related changes.

Dr. Gene has demonstrated her vast leadership abilities in this past year in response to COVID. As our hospital suddenly faced many challenges due to COVID, she has eagerly stepped up to be a helping hand, often in a managerial role. She served as one of the labor pool co-managers, creating weekly schedules to utilize employees from different departments to staff various new needs, such as employee and patient screening, outdoor COVID testing and urgent care, COVID hotline, and COVID vaccinations. She actively participated in all of these tasks, often staying late or coming in on the weekends to provide screenings. As her labor pool co-manager, I personally know of the challenges this role entails, including employees simply not wanting to participate, an overwhelming need for more staff during the rougher months of the pandemic, and as time went on, burn-out of those employees we depended on frequently. However, she always met trials with a good attitude, coming up with new ideas to better use staff and resources to meet the hospital's needs.

When our hospital was providing services in outdoor tents (urgent care clinic and drive-through COVID testing), Dr. Gene was one of the few people willing to lead the way. Dr. Gene often worked outside, and thus, understood the day-to-day complexities of providing services outside in volatile high desert weather and in full personal protective equipment. I often worked closely with her to figure out better ways to do things to make tasks easier and safer for staff. She was part of a small group who would provide training to staff before each shift since staffing changed so often. And she was outside every morning and every evening helping out with the physically demanding task of set up and break down. Even when she was not stationed outside, she would often be called upon for help and advice in different situations.

A notable example of Dr. Gene's innovation is when she spearheaded a mass COVID drive through testing day in anticipation of religious events occurring in the Zuni Pueblo. With our limited space, she developed a traffic flow plan that could get cars in and out easily without blocking our ambulance access. Dr. Gene recruited plenty of staff to help, assigned them to different roles and provided training. She also organized lunch and refreshments for everyone participating. In addition, she helped to figure out a new process that could serve patients more quickly. The previous process of checking patients in and getting a swab was laborious and time-intensive, with patients often waiting in their cars in the summer heat for long periods of time. The new protocol was much quicker with fewer steps, allowing patients to be swabbed within a few minutes of pulling up, and has been implemented ever since. The mass swabbing event was a huge success and great service to our community under Dr. Gene's direction.

More recently, Dr. Gene has been one of the main leaders of our COVID vaccination efforts. When word came that we would be receiving vaccines, Dr. Gene quickly joined

the planning committee and worked with others to figure out how we would provide vaccines. She was often leading the vaccine clinic in the early days, implementing changes as needed to fine-tune the process, and training staff. She has given up many Saturdays to lead weekend vaccine clinic. Dr. Gene has worked closely with many other people within the hospital to keep track of how many vaccines we were receiving weekly, ensuring there were enough patient handouts and forms, and brainstorming how to scale up. She also planned and implemented a mass drive through vaccine clinic, organizing nearly 50 individuals into different roles. This drive through was a great success, efficient, and served over 500 patients in one day because of her leadership.

As vaccine clinic ramped up, our hospital began reopening various clinics, which meant that many employees were no longer available to provide services through the labor pool. The best solution was to hire more staff, but few supervisors were willing to go through the process of hiring new employees just to send to the labor pool. However, Dr. Gene was more than willing to take on this responsibility. In a few days' time, she completed the necessary paperwork, reviewed applicants, conducted phone interviews, and submitted recommendations to HR. These new employees started shortly afterwards under Dr. Gene's supervision. She made sure that new hires were fit-tested for N95 masks, completed their PPE and hand hygiene competencies, and were ready to perform their tasks within a day of coming on board. Without Dr. Gene's initiative in adding new staff, our hospital would not have been able to sustain or even consider increasing our vaccine clinic's capacity.

Even with all these extra tasks, Dr. Gene has done a fantastic job as Acting Chief of Optometry starting in early 2020. Despite being only 2.5 years into her career when she started the role, she has excelled in this position. She has kept up with the many tasks of being chief including monthly reports, supervisor meetings, and employee plans. She has been transparent and timely in sharing information from leadership with her staff, and is receptive to her staff's questions and concerns. Dr. Gene has also continued to provide excellent care to her patients and is a mentor for our residency program. In response to COVID, she has closely monitored how and when the eye clinic can reopen and to what extent, making sure that staff and patients are safe. Even with all these new challenges, Dr. Gene comes to work daily with a cheery "can-do" attitude, coming up with new solutions regularly and infusing energy in situations that seem difficult.

Dr. Gene has played a vital role in Zuni IHS' numerous efforts to combat COVID in this past year. She has been a leader and active participant in our outdoor urgent care and drive through testing, COVID vaccine clinic, employee and patient screenings, and COVID hotline. There is no doubt that Dr. Gene's presence and leadership at our facility has allowed our COVID response to be as successful as it has been. She has taken on so many different roles, often in a supervisory capacity, and has proven herself to be an innovative, efficient, and well-loved leader by all. Through all of this, she has been an excellent Acting Chief of Optometry and continues to provide stellar optometric care to her patients. As her peer and co-laborer in many of these efforts, I whole-heartedly nominate Dr. Erelida Gene for the Richard Hatch Junior OD of the Year Award.