Ten years ago, Southcentral Foundation was a typical, inefficient health care system. Patients had to wait weeks to get an appointment and had to wait again when coming into the office. Care was impersonal. Patients often saw a different provider at each appointment. Patients weren't happy, staff wasn’t happy and doctors weren't happy. In the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, the US Congress recognized that if the people receiving health care services were involved in the decision-making process, or owned the entities that delivered the services, there would be a greater potential for improving their health statistics. Alaska Native leadership saw this federal law as an opportunity to completely redesign the health care system to better meet the needs, values and priorities of the Alaska Native Community. Southcentral Foundation was formed in 1982 to provide these health care services to Alaska Native and American Indian people of Southcentral Alaska—the Cook Inlet Region. Under this new federal authority, Southcentral Foundation began providing health care services under contracts with the federal government in 1987. By 1999, we had completed the transition to a customer-owned system. Today, fewer than 10 years after completing this transition, Southcentral Foundation is achieving world-class health outcomes for indigenous peoples of Alaska, while achieving high levels of customer and employee satisfaction. I thank you for offering me the opportunity to tell you about our journey and some of the principles that have led to where we are today.
Southcentral Foundation is a non-profit affiliate of Cook Inlet Region, Inc., operating under Tribal Authority – Section 328, governed by a board of directors, chaired by James Segura.

- **Cook Inlet Region, Inc.**
  - Tribal Authority – Section 328
- **Governing Board**
  - James Segura, Board Chairman
  - Charles G. Anderson
  - B. Agnes Brown
  - Karen Caindec
  - Sophia Chase
  - Roy Huhndorf
  - Dr. Terry Simpson
Our Mission is: Working together with the Native Community to achieve wellness through health and related services. We are working toward a Vision of a Native Community that enjoys physical, mental, emotional and spiritual wellness. The Key Points of our approach to health care are: Shared Responsibility, Commitment to Quality, and Family Wellness.
I will be sharing with you today many of our 13 Operational Principles—which spell out relationship—that we have developed into what we call our Nuka Model.
The most important thing to keep in mind about our Nuka model, is that it is a relationship-based system. Just as our Native Community is based on relationships, we have built our health care system on relationships, which encompass Tribal Governance Relationships, Employee Relationships, Community Relationships, and Provider Relationships.
Here are some current statistics about Southcentral Foundation: We have been providing health care services for 26 years using innovative, relationship-based, customer-driven systems. Our 1,350 staff members provide world-class quality services to some 45,000 customer/owners including 10,000 in 55 remote villages.
Of all the changes we have made, the most significant one has been to place Alaska Native people in ownership and leadership of the organization. To do this, we are training and grooming our own with 62% of managers now Alaska Native/American Indian people. We are also placing high emphasis on identifying and addressing major health disparities for Alaska Native people: Cancer, Obesity, Diabetes, Domestic Violence, Child Abuse, Child Neglect, Substance Abuse, Dental Care, and Suicide Prevention.
The range of our service has expanded dramatically from a single dental chair in the early 1980s to include Primary Care, Optometry, Physical Therapy, Outpatient services, Behavioral Health, Residential Treatment for adolescents, and Residential Treatment for women, to name only a few.
The list goes on, and even includes Traditional Healing and Complementary Medicine—two components of health care that our community values, but were not provided under the old federal system of health care for Native people. Home Health, and Health Education help members of our community take responsibility for their own health, while the Elder Program…
…and our Head Start Programs are bookends to our full range of services for a system that values and respects every member of our community.
One of the challenges to health care for us as Native People in the Arctic regions has been finding useful research information that can help us focus priorities for our scarce health care resources. To this end, Southcentral Foundation has set research objectives to, first, become a center for excellence in Alaska Native health research and for training Alaska Native researchers, and then to improve the health of Alaska Native people through research and training of Native researchers.
The areas of interest with long term benefits we have for research projects include Ethical and Cultural Implications of Specimen Banking among Alaska Native People and the Family Health History Demonstration Project.
Other studies that reflect our high priority health care issues include Tobacco-Free Alaska Native Families, a Pilot Study of Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol among Alaska Native Infants, and Depression Screening among Alaska Native and American Indian people.
One of our initiatives breaking new ground is our Family Wellness Warriors Initiative, with the goal to end Domestic Violence, Child Abuse and Child Neglect in this generation. Our objectives for this initiative include Calling out the Warriors—an appeal to the men in our community to reclaim their traditional roles as protectors of our families. Other objectives include: developing methods to counter and break the silence around abuse; restructuring systems; establishing safe adults and environment; enhancing existing resources; and developing collaborations.
A valuable spin-off for this initiative has been the benefit of the Family Wellness Warriors Core Concepts to the whole Southcentral Foundation organization—all 1,350 employees. We have learned that for a large organization to work together as a family, we need to understand how we impact others. This includes: understanding your own relational style; how your experiences contribute to how you approach others; and how to articulate your story from the heart. When we learn to understand the power of empathy and compassion for yourself and others, we can build a healthier environment for family, work and community.
Core Concepts...con’t.

- Understand your personal and professional aspirations
  - Opportunity to align your aspirations, intentions and behaviors
  - Understand how you can create shared vision
- Learn methods for good dialogue and productive conversations
  - Understand the impact of intentions
  - Understand how to listen effectively
  - Understand how good dialogue and productive conversations will affect SCF
  - Explore tools for having good conversations

Other core concepts include: understanding your personal and professional aspirations; and learning methods for good dialogue and productive conversations.
Our largest single facility for providing a wide range of health care services, our Primary Care Center, is located at the heart of the Alaska Native Medical Campus in Anchorage.
The Primary Care Center is an integral part of the Alaska Native Medical Center, and is complemented by the adjacent Alaska Native Hospital. These facilities have been the birthplace and home to our most dramatic achievements in health care under the Nuka Model system. Our complete redesign of the system in accordance with Native values has yielded the following outcomes: Same-day access to care; which has led to a 40% decrease in costly Emergency Room and Urgent Care visits; a decrease in specialty care by about 50%; a decrease in primary care visits by 20%; and a decrease in admissions and days by 30%. These remarkable cost-saving achievements have all been accompanied by improved health outcomes, customer and staff satisfaction.
The Alaska Native Hospital, which just observed its tenth anniversary, is co-owned and managed by Southcentral Foundation and the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, an Alaska-wide organization health care organization.
The world-class Alaska Native Medical Center has a full system, 150-Bed Hospital, and houses Alaska’s only Level II Trauma Center. Its highly regarded, Magnet-Status nursing staff helped manage more than 400,000 outpatient visits last year.
Since the Alaska Native Medical Center is co-managed by the statewide Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, our customer/owner base includes all Alaska Native and American Indian groups across Alaska, and features consultations with specialists and residential programs across the great expanse of Alaska, an area approximately 1/5 the size of the entire United States.
The more regionally focused Southcentral Foundation focuses on more than 45,000 customer/owners, who are mostly in the Anchorage area, plus 10,000 customer/owners who reside in 55 remote villages in our Anchorage Service Unit.
We provide health care services to residents of villages up to 1,500 miles away, despite challenging locations and weather conditions, through collaboration with 55 independent tribal entities. To facilitate this collaboration, tribal leaders meet regularly to participate in managing clinical services, facility design and building, grant writing, and collaboration with the Alaska Native Medical Center.
With 53% of Southcentral Foundation employees being Alaska Native and American Indian people, you can be assured that the voice of the customer resonates throughout the organization. Alaska Native and American Indian people recognize our families will utilize these services for generations to come.
To ensure we can hear all of our customer/owners’ voices, we have grown many new kinds of “ears,” that include not just personal interaction with staff, but also comment cards, special events, surveys, a 24-hour telephone hotline, special “Listening Conferences,” focus groups and advisory committees made up of customer/owners.

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<th>Customer/Owner Listening</th>
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<td><strong>Not just one method of listening</strong></td>
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<td>- Personal interaction with staff</td>
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<td>- Group visits</td>
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<td>- Comment cards</td>
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<td>- Customer Satisfaction surveys</td>
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<td>- SCF internet</td>
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<td>- Annual Gathering</td>
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<td>- 24-hour hotline</td>
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Managing a Relationship-Based System of Care

- Establish relationships with providers
- Continue to remove access barriers
- Relationship based on dignity, respect and trust
- Support customer’s plan for health
- Evaluate success

These mechanisms for hearing from our customer/owners are an essential component of managing our Nuka model for a relationship-based system of care. That system also includes building and maintaining relationships between customer/owners and providers, while continuing to identify and remove access barriers. We have established that these relationships must be based on dignity, respect and trust. They must support our customer’s plan for health, and also constantly help evaluate our level of success.
Some of our latest initiatives include Chronic disease management, Behaviorist integration into primary care, and Behavioral Health Redesign.
Southcentral Foundation leaders recognize performance gaps and have formed teams to carry out process evaluation and improvement using the PDSA Model for Improvement through systematic, data-based performance review. In addition, we benchmark our efforts against high-performing organizations inside and outside health care, such as Baldrige Award recipients, IHI learning collaborates, HEDIS, etc.
Southcentral Foundation promotes innovation through the strategic planning process, training on process improvement tools, and an organization-wide focus on driving innovation and improvement.
The Nuka Model places great emphasis on workforce development. To that end, Southcentral Foundation established an organizational Development Center on the Alaskan Native Medical Campus in 2001. This center’s primary purposes are to strengthen the development of Alaska Native leaders, while increasing the number of Alaska Native employees. The Development Center ensures that the design, delivery and development of training is systematic, and promotes corporate objectives.
The relationships component of Southcentral Foundation that I have mentioned previously is borne out organizationally by our heavy reliance on teams. Each team is empowered to improve and innovate to respond quickly and with agility to customer requirements and organizational needs. This approach to organizing the workforce promotes employees’ initiative and engagement.

Managing & Organizing the Workforce

- Through organization in teams, empowered to improve and innovate, SCF achieves agility in responding to customer requirements and organizational needs.
- This approach to organizing the workforce promotes employees’ initiative and engagement.
These teams include administrative and leadership groups, but provider teams provide essential customer contact and response mechanisms.
The lynchpin for the agility in our teamwork is the same as for any set of relationships, and that is TRUST – trust with governing bodies, with one another, with customer/owners, and with our partners.
What kind of challenges do we face? Like any service provider, our first challenge is to continue to responding to customers’ expectations for service delivery. The second challenge is in developing a recruitment and retention strategy that addresses the long-term needs of SCF. We must also keep pace with the changing regulatory environment, while developing new business lines, and while ensuring the sustainability of current programs.
Additional challenges include finding ways to engage customer/owners and families in their journey toward wellness. At the same time, we must cope with the in-migration of customer/owners into Anchorage and Matsu Valley from remote locations of Alaska. This in-migration contributes to our challenge of maintaining sufficient capacity of our facilities to accommodate growth of current and future programs.
Of course, our single biggest challenge is the strategic challenge of sustainability—
maintaining our ability to balance, align and integrate responses to key challenges while
maintaining and enhancing necessary funding stream.
But I have great confidence in the strength of our strategic advantages to prevail over our many challenges. The greatest of these advantages is our reliance on our customer/owners, who not only use the system, but have a stake in it because they own it. A second advantage is our workforce development focus. We are a learning organization that is making itself stronger from within. We also benefit from our focus on multi-dimensional wellness for the whole community, for the whole life of each customer.
And, as I have previously emphasized, our relationship focus drives everything we do, giving our organization the power of synergy and team spirit. We also benefit from the advantage of longevity in leadership and governance that provides consistency in direction and focus. Finally, our internalized Mission results in willingness to continuously change and innovate.
In conclusion, I want to point out that our competitive position is characterized by several factors, including a soaring population, though we continue to provide services to 95% of those eligible. We will always maintain our focus on collaboration—not competition—as we continue to identify service gaps and identify potential collaborators. Finally, our mutual understanding of our core competencies, advantages, and challenges, will forever drive our willingness to embrace innovation.
So that’s the story of Southcentral Foundation. I am so proud of what our customer/owners and our employees and our organization are doing, that it is hard not to brag about it. My staff members and I will be glad to discuss our results and recognitions with any of you who would like to learn more.
In closing, I want to thank you for letting me share our exciting Nuka model for achieving our vision of a Native Community that enjoys wellness through the fostering of relationships. By being in relationships with each other and our customer/owners, we are making great headway in preventative care. We also encourage all of you to make arrangements to come and see our system for yourself.