

Testimony by

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On behalf of

The Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation International

At the hearing entitled:

*A Way out of the Diabetes Crisis in Indian Country and Beyond*

Before the

Senate Indian Affairs Committee

Wednesday, June 30, 2010

9:30AM

Good morning. Thank you Chairman Dorgan, Vice Chairman Barrasso, and members of the Committee. My name is Gary Hall, Jr., and it is my honor to appear before you today to speak about the influence of type 1 diabetes on my life and the impact of research in managing, preventing and curing diabetes.

My family's ties to swimming run deep, and I've been drawn to the water my entire life. I won my first national title when I was 18 and continued my success at the University of Texas, after which I won 2 gold and 2 silver medals in the 1996 Olympics. Things were going according to plan, and I was feeling really good about my path in life.

In 1999, my world changed. Having no previous exposure to diabetes, I was caught off guard when I started experiencing symptoms of the disease. I was extremely tired, constantly dehydrated, and had blurred vision. Finally, I collapsed.

Later in the hospital, I was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes. My immune system was attacking the insulin-producing cells in my pancreas, and I would need to inject or pump insulin into my body several times a day, every day, for the rest of my life. Within hours, my entire life had changed forever. My previous focus on training shifted to learning of insulin shots, glucose tests and carbohydrate ratios.

I took time off from swimming and, with the help of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, devoted myself to researching this disease. It shocked me to learn about the complications associated with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes. Blindness, amputations, kidney failure and stroke were now closer to becoming a reality for me than I had ever imagined. Diabetes is a terrifying disease, but at that moment, I resolved not to let it stop me or the pursuit of my dreams.

I soon returned to swimming, determined not only to win at the sport, but also to show the world I could do it with diabetes. And as I sit before you today, I am proud to say I accomplished just that. Since being diagnosed with type 1 diabetes, I have won 6 medals in the 2000 and 2004 Olympic games.

All of my accomplishments can't change the severity of this disease and the heavy toll it is taking on my body. While I hope that my story is an inspiration for those living with diabetes, I must say that all of the children, adults, and families impacted by this disease are truly the greatest inspiration to me. Knowing the reality of life with diabetes, I am continually amazed at the stories of families and individuals who give back while persevering through this disease.

Take Anela from Hawaii, who was diagnosed with type 1 when she 9 years old. She is so determined to be a part of the cure that she enrolled in a research trial studying the environmental factors that may contribute to diabetes. Anela is actively helping researchers determine the cause of diabetes so they can find a cure for it.

Another example is Scott from Nevada, whose son was diagnosed with type 1 diabetes when he was eight years old. With no family history of diabetes, Scott enrolled in a clinical research study that showed he was at high risk of developing

diabetes. Five years later, when he was eventually diagnosed, he immediately enrolled in another study to test a drug designed to halt the autoimmune attack involved in type 1 diabetes. Years later, Scott still produces some of his own insulin, and the drug appears to be slowing the progression of the disease and the development of complications.

By participating in research, Anela and Scott have contributed to the tremendous advancements in diabetes treatments and technologies that are improving the lives of people living with diabetes. These advancements would not be possible without the Special Diabetes Program, which funds 35% of all diabetes research at the National Institutes of Health. This program supports the large scale, multi-center research trials like the ones Anela and Scott participated in and also funds critical diabetes education, treatment and prevention programs for Native Americans.

Thanks to the Special Diabetes Program, research has moved from the lab to human clinical trials that are identifying those at high risk for type 1 diabetes and testing therapies to prevent the onset of the disease and slow its progression. This program is funding groundbreaking research to help advance an artificial pancreas that would help patients achieve better glucose control, reducing the risk of diabetes complications. And on the complications front, a clinical trial funded by the Special Diabetes Program recently confirmed the ability to halt and reverse diabetic eye disease, which is the leading cause of adult onset blindness.

I would like to offer a special thanks to Chairman Dorgan for sponsoring legislation along with Sen. Susan Collins to renew the Special Diabetes Program this year. Mr. Chairman, your extraordinary leadership and commitment to renew this program this year is deeply appreciated. I would also like to thank Vice Chairman Barrasso and the members of this committee, a majority of which are co-sponsors of Sen. Dorgan's legislation, S. 3058. This program is drastically changing – if not saving – the lives of countless people with diabetes. Its renewal will bring us one step farther along on our path to a cure for this devastating disease.

Thank you again for having me here today and for your commitment to diabetes research and individuals across this country living with diabetes.

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