

Lucia “Luci” Hernandez serves with the EBCI Tribal Option at the Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority and is widely recognized for her professionalism, creativity, and unwavering dedication to improving both staff engagement and patient care. Through her leadership, innovation, and collaborative spirit, Luci has become an invaluable resource across departments and a driving force behind initiatives that strengthen teamwork, communication, and organizational culture.

Luci consistently demonstrates integrity by leading through example, accountability, and transparency in every aspect of her work. Her professionalism and positive attitude foster trust and mutual respect among colleagues, while her willingness to take ownership of challenges inspires those around her. One example of her commitment to excellence is her active participation in Primary Care huddles, where she takes the initiative to thoroughly understand critical policy updates, GPRA measures, and operational changes so she can clearly communicate them to staff. Her ability to explain complex information in an approachable and understandable way helps prevent issues before they arise and ensures team members feel informed and supported.

Known for her responsiveness and attentiveness, Luci approaches every concern with urgency, compassion, and focus. In her role as a Performance Improvement Specialist, she makes every department she works with feel valued and prioritized. Staff consistently describe her as reliable, organized, and deeply invested in helping others succeed. Whether assisting with process improvement initiatives, supporting operational challenges, or helping staff navigate new systems, Luci ensures those around her know they have a dedicated resource available to support them.

Luci continually rises above expectations and willingly steps beyond the boundaries of her formal role to help strengthen the organization. Her contributions extend well beyond Tribal Option, as she actively supports hospital-wide initiatives and community programs such as the Cherokee Choices Mother’s Gathering, reinforcing the hospital’s commitment to holistic and community-centered care. Her willingness to step in wherever help is needed and her commitment to organizational success make her an invaluable asset to both her department and the broader Cherokee community.

A natural collaborator and motivator, Luci exemplifies teamwork through her dedication to creating a supportive, engaging, and positive work environment. She regularly develops creative team-building activities, holiday events, and morale-boosting initiatives that strengthen relationships and encourage unity among staff. Her partnership with Primary Care leadership led to the creation of the “Bright Light Award,” an initiative recognizing team members who go above and beyond in service to patients and coworkers. The program, which rewards employees with additional PTO and cafeteria meals, has become a tremendous success in boosting morale and fostering appreciation throughout the department. Luci often personally contributes decorations, balloons, and prizes to ensure award recipients feel genuinely celebrated and valued.

Her creativity and innovation have had a measurable impact across multiple departments within Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority. Luci helped develop and support the Primary Care initiative “The Choice,” a team-based competition inspired by the television show “The Voice” that encouraged collaboration and engagement through fun and interactive challenges. She

transformed the event into an exciting experience through thoughtful planning, creative decorations, music, and entertainment that brought staff together in a meaningful way.

Luci's innovative mindset extends beyond employee engagement into operational improvement and patient experience. She redesigned suggestion boxes across CIHA campuses and satellite clinics by incorporating QR codes unique to each location, improving accessibility and inclusivity for patient feedback. She also collaborated with the Procedure Suite to create personalized patient surveys aimed at improving the patient experience and enhancing systems of care. At Tsali Care Center, Luci redesigned PPE cabinets with clear labeling and par systems to improve supply tracking and support infection control efforts. Additionally, she revitalized Primary Care huddle boards with interactive monthly themes, dashboard data, coloring activities, and staff recognition, helping improve communication and engagement among employees. She also created a bi-weekly Primary Care newsletter that provided staff with leadership updates, EHR tips, new employee introductions, and guidance on proper GPRa documentation.

Through her leadership, creativity, and dedication to serving others, Lucia Hernandez embodies the mission and values of the Cherokee Indian Hospital Authority. Her ability to inspire others, strengthen organizational culture, and improve both employee and patient experiences makes her exceptionally deserving of recognition as Employee of the Year.