

Rural Health Corporation seeks management of Juneau clinic

The South East Regional Health Corporation (SEARHC) is currently developing a proposal aimed towards their assuming full management authority of the Juneau Indian Health Clinic Service (IHS).

This decision by the Board of Directors of SEARHC came after consultation with clinic Director, Bill Diebels; Service Unit Director, Art Williams and other IHS employees.

The clinic is now suffering from a decrease in funds to support the services at the level currently provided. This erosion of services will get considerably worse during the up-coming years.

The one possible way for services to remain at the current level or possibly improve is for an outside organization to assume management of the clinic. The federal government has many constraints placed upon the IHS, for example: This clinic cannot collect Medicare or Medicaid payments which accounts for a significant loss of revenue which might be used for improvement of service.

This holds true for other types of insurance coverage also. The clinic provides care to Coast Guard and their dependents and the monies collected do not stay here in Juneau, but rather are transferred to Washington D.C. When the clinic loses an employee due to resignation, being fired or laid off, because of the personnel freeze they cannot replace that worker without permission from headquarters which is an extremely difficult task. Because it is a non-profit agency, SEARHC is not a government system, is

not bound by these restrictions.

Generally in all of the problem areas outlined, SEARHC can deal with such as collecting medicare, private Insurance and Coast Guard collections or hiring, replacing or modifying the personnel schedules as required.

This attempt to administer the clinic is not for the purposes of empire building but rather to retain and improve the quality of health care to Native people.

As a separate but closely aligned issue, it is SEARHC's intention to contract for the Juneau Mental Health Center (currently administered by the state). It is presently the only state-run clinic in Southeast.

We feel that mental health services to urban and rural Natives have been less than a success. In order to focus on a solution to this problem, we, in SEARHC, must have input into the decision-making process. To make a substantial difference, "we need to influence from the top down, rather than always swimming up stream."

SEARHC has a network of Community Health Representatives (CPR's) both in Juneau and outlying villages that can carry out Mental Health assistance. SEARHC needs the core of the clinic to provide the professional back-up and support. SEARHC is committed to making a difference in the alarming rise in mental health problems among Native people. To do this, SEARHC needs the support of you, our neighbors, brothers, sisters, and our community. We all have a vested interest. It is time to take our health care seriously.