

Health aide training center opens in Sitka

JUNEAU — Six community health aides from rural Southeast Alaska are in Sitka as the first participants at a new training facility for village health care paraprofessionals, according to the Southeast Alaska Regional Health Corp.

SEARHC began operation this month of the state's fourth community health aide training center, under contract with the Indian Health Service.

The Sitka center, based at Mt. Edgecumbe Hospital, is the only such facility in Southeast. Previously, health aides from Southeast had to travel to Anchorage for training. There also are centers in Bethel and Nome.

SEARHC Community Health Care Coordinator Bill Burton, who heads the new training center, said that the large backlog in meeting training demands throughout the state necessitated an additional facility.

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The selection of Mt. Edgecumbe as the site for the new center is a benefit to aides in Southeast, he said. Previously, the requirement for aides to train so far from home was a real hardship and discouraged many qualified villagers from entering the program. Sitka is clearly a better option for residents of the region, Burton said.

The health aide program was designed by the Indian Health Service to extend primary care to underserved Alaska Natives living great distances from health care facilities. The program is unique to Alaska.

Community health aides are village-based paraprofessional health care providers. Their basic training consists of three sessions each, lasting three to four weeks, followed by a two-week preceptorship.

Training sessions are interspersed with months of village-based clinical

experience. Medical supervision is provided by hospital-based physicians who maintain regular telephone contact with the aides.

The community health aide often is the sole health care provider residing in a rural village. There are more than 200 aides statewide in more than 150 villages. In 1987, aides provided care in more than 200,000 patient visits. SEARHC administers the health aide program in Southeast.

Health aides participating in the first Sitka session are Lena Wood of Angoon, Jean Edenshaw of Hydaburg,

Tammy Williams of Kake, Diana Williams of Kake, Tina Pratt of Hoonah and Diane Crowe of Craig.

The emphasis of the first session is on physical exams, lab skills, anatomy and physiology. Session Two concentrates on obstetrics and gynecology, as well as pediatrics, while the last session deals with chronic diseases.

Training center head Burton is a mid-level practitioner who served as a physician's assistant in Hoonah for four years. His staff includes four other mid-level practitioners: Shirley Brooks, Bill Plummer, Jo An Head

and Steve Gage.

A special feature of SEARHC's training will be its field component. Each trainer will be responsible for traveling to villages between sessions to do followup work with health aides in their village clinics. As a result, Burton said, the aides will now be able to receive training that is more timely and relates more specifically to conditions in Southeast villages.

While the center will emphasize the training needs of Southeast, it also will take participants from other regions of the state as space permits.