

Unique Dial System for Medical Assistance in Alaska Coming

WASHINGTON—Physicians throughout Alaska will soon have access to a unique dial system for medical assistance, according to U.S. Sen. Mike Gravel.

Gravel said that physicians and technicians who have access to a telephone will be able to dial one of several code numbers and hear an audio tape on a specific patient problem, depending on the code dialed.

"The National Center for Biomedical Communications has supported the service," Gravel said, "and is installing its own

ground station in Maryland through which it will communicate with Alaska."

The station will be on site this week Gravel said.

Bernard Poirier, special assistant to Gravel who has been assigned to this program, will outline the dial system Thursday in a speech prepared for a Satellite Communications Conference in Anchorage.

"The system will not, however, necessarily be dependent on the availability of a satellite," he said.

The communications link was developed as part of a satellite communications package that Gravel has been working on for Alaska.

Gravel said he approached the center with regard to the nine-month program he has proposed to bring live educational and cultural television to Alaska. Four sites have been mentioned for the first phase of this pilot program—Fairbanks, Fort Yukon, Nome and Kodiak.

"During the scope of our discussions," Gravel said, "we discovered that this service could be made available to Alaska regardless of the status of the satellite.

"The National Center supported the concept," Gravel said, "and is seeking additional ways

to increase its medical services to the state."

The system, which Gravel said would soon be operational is the Wisconsin Dial Access System (WDAS). Basic costs of the system will be borne by the federal government, Gravel said.

Gravel said he is also discussing the possibility of linking the Vermont system with the national Center system. The Vermont system provides specialty diagnostic and therapeutic information, he said.

"Once the satellite system is functional," Gravel said, "the Center, through the National Medical Audiovisual Center, will provide motion pictures, slides and videotapes to be used as part of the medical education system of the program."

At that time, Gravel said, physicians and technicians throughout Alaska will have at their fingertips the latest available medical information, audio and video.

"The more we delve into this communications program," Gravel said, "the more evidence we find to substantiate the need for the complete system.

"The benefits available under the system certainly warrant a massive effort by all those concerned with the welfare of the people of Alaska," he said.