

Health panel should study traditional ways

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The Alaska Public Health Association (ALPHA) subcommittee on Health Service Organizations has agreed to recommend that the state study the traditional family support systems, spiritual beliefs and healing techniques of Native villages in Alaska. It also recommends that the state work with each village to develop integrated health care organizations which can be managed by the villages using state, federal and private funds.

In an address before the subcommittee, which met this past weekend during the Sixth Annual Health Congress at the Anchorage Westward Hilton, David E. Cates, Executive Director of the Alaska Native Health Board, stressed the need for statewide sensitivity to the traditional Native lifestyles.

"Each family managed its own affairs and the elder member supervised the others," Cates explained.

"Traditionally, children had been raised for skills and independent living in small groups. They emphasized the values of self sufficiency, generosity and sharing, imbedded in the system of mutual help and obligations,

commitment to one's family and villages. A good Eskimo or a successful Indian, according to their tradition was a fundamentally different creature from a good and successful Eskimo or Indian according to Western culture," Cates said.

"Two or three generations ago, if members of a village had a problem, the entire community would meet in virtually a marathon session until a settlement could be agreed upon by both parties," Cates continued. "Generally the tradition is to use what we now call positive reinforcement to alter the undesired activities and prevention to control reoccurrence. If, for example, one person or a family had a drinking problem, the members of the village would talk it out with them emphasizing the community things that were well done and how important they are to the village. Also, they would cut off the source of alcohol," Cates added.

According to Cates, the villagers must now work with regional health aides, the State Troopers, regional health corporations, counselors for the Federal government, the village council, the city council and the Indian Health Service (IHS) Unit Board to get the same problem solved. Many villages do not

have enough trained leaders to guide them through the system.

In a subsequent discussion monitored by ALPHA member Jan Gehler, Kent Autor, the Executive Director of Alaska Health and Social Service Consultants, Inc., said "We seem to have a paradox of choices that must somehow balance cultural integrity, and self identity and yet meet modern needs."

Betsy Woodman, from the Alaska Dental Society, recommended that all prejudices be kept out of decisions so that a stigma would not fall upon the new organizations created. "There is a tendency to look at peoples' immediate needs without looking at the historical past," Woodman declared.

Ronald (Ron) Hammett, a member of the Bean's Cafe executive Board said, "You can't be mechanistic. You can't design a program and push it upon the villages. You have to design and test your new organizations with the villages."

"I'm 10,000 percent against

asking the state to take over IHS, but the state could help the villages handle services IHS does not provide," Cates said.

At the moment IHS does not provide long-term or skilled nursing, homemaker care, audiological screening, eyeglasses, mental health services, speech therapy, vocational rehabilitation and many other urgently needed services. To fund these services, the Native health boards seeks foundation grants and third-party payments.

Also, non-hospital clinics cannot file for medicare fees be-

cause state laws define clinics as mental health treatment sites. According to Cates, 20 percent of the Alaska Native populace is eligible for medicare.

Gehler noted the subcommittee's recommendations and forwarded them to ALPHA's new president, Robert Hall, who also serves as the Anchorage director for the Department of Health and Environmental Protection.

Hall presented the recommendations to the full ALPHA membership Saturday afternoon. They will be forwarded to the state soon.