

Indian Health, No Disruption

In a press release on changes in Public Health Service personnel systems issued November 21, 1971, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Elliot L. Richardson gave his assurance that services to Indian people would not be disrupted in any manner, and that no action was imminent that would affect current Indian Health Service hiring and promotion policies, or interfere with the maintenance of vital health services to Indian communities.

Movement toward unifying the two systems presently used—the PHS Commissioned Corps and Civil Service—into one system, will be done very gradually, the Secretary stated.

Such a move was the recommendation of a Secretary's committee to study the PHS Commissioned Corps, headed by Dr. John A. Perkins of Northwestern University.

Recognition of certain deficiencies in the present systems prompted the search for a better system, he explained, and until one is found the present systems will not only be continued, but will be revitalized and strengthened.

Dr. Merline K. DuVal, Jr., HEW's Assistant Secretary for Scientific Affairs, immediately followed up with a reinforcement of these statements by the Secretary.

Dr. DuVal added his reassurance that Indians' concerns would be completely protected and the Indian health program kept as a priority effort of the Department.

Of the approximately 7,000 employees of the Indian Health Service, about one sixth are members of the Commissioned Corps, a uniformed service with requirements, structure and benefits similar to the U.S. Navy.

Since the Corps is made up of highly qualified health professionals—physicians, dentists, nurses, pharmacists, engineers, sanitary engineers and sanitarians—the main leadership of the Indian Health Service is centered in the Corps.

Dr. Emery A. Johnson, Assistant Surgeon General, is Director of the Indian Health Service.