

PHS M.D. Explains Complex Services

Alaska Native Medical Center
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Anchorage, Alaska 99501

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Mr. Howard Rock
Editor
The Tundra Times
Box 1287
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

Dear Mr. Rock:

The health problems of the Alaska Native people are very large, they are complex, and delivery of health services is complicated by many factors of geography and climate. Very few people outside the Native population themselves understand the extent to which Native People are burdened by disease, by disability, and by premature death; nor is it widely known with what courage and dignity the Native People bear these burdens.

Most of the new physicians entering our program come for the purpose of discharging their military obligation. This obligation is for two years only, but many of these men stay on for at least one extra year. A significant number of them have elected to make this service their life work, and the senior staff of our hospital system is mainly composed of such physicians. Why do they do this? These are outstanding men and women and, financially, any of them could do much better almost anywhere. The answer is simple: They have developed a great respect for the Alaska Native People and consider them as partners in the endeavor to bring better health. This partnership brings many rewards and there is, among the staff of our hospitals, a sense of real achievement and a deep conviction that this service is of enduring significance. This partnership has made possible very real accomplishments in meeting some of the health problems that have had such a tragic impact and have, in the past, actually threatened extinction of some groups. Much has been accomplished, but there is yet a great deal left to be done.

Most of the senior staff of our hospital system in Alaska consider themselves to be Alaskans; they have been here a long time and they intend to stay until their job is finished. They are all very proud to be able to serve the Alaska Native people. Further, may I say the Alaska Native People may also be proud of them and of their work. Their dedication, diligence competence and patience have been outstanding.

In addition to our own staff, there are a number of physicians and dentists in private practice who have a genuine concern for the health of Alaska Natives. In Anchorage, alone, more than twenty of these specialists serve as consultants both to the Medical Center and to the outlying hospitals.

As Director of the Alaska Native Medical Center, I personally count it a great honor to be associated with the men and women of our hospital system and of our consulting staff. The accomplishments of this group, in partnership with the people they serve, will soon set a mark that will be a source of pride for all Alaskans and, indeed, for the Nation as a whole.

Sincerely yours,

Martha R. Wilson, M.D.
Medical Director
Service Unit Director