

Emergency medical service--village style

FROM RESPONSE: EMS ALASKA

How do you develop Emergency Medical Services for eleven small villages spread across an area the size of Indiana? Mauneluk Association in Kotzebue has capitalized on the built-in intimacy of Northwest Alaska's small population to offset the vast distances that separate these 5,000 people.

"It's an advantage that so many people know one another," says Jeff Smith, director for Community Medical Services. "Patients know their own Health Aides, the State Trooper, the air taxi pilots, and the staff at the hospital. People fear what they do not know, but with public education and familiar faces in the system, there is an attitude of trust that might be missing in an urban setting."

Communication is the focal point of Mauneluk's EMS program. An FM radio system has been developed to connect the Volunteer Fire Department's new ambulance with the police,

fire department, the hospital, and medical personnel on call. A public education program is underway; it includes a half hour home safety program on the local radio station every week, public service announcements on the air, and the development of a slide show for village residents to acquaint them with the emergency health care system. It is all part of an effort to tie in all the components of emergency care in Northwest Alaska, and to make it all familiar to the citizens who will use the system.

To link the local system to facilities statewide, Mauneluk Association is negotiating transfer agreements between Kotzebue facilities and hospitals in Anchorage and the lower 48 states.

When it merged with the Kotzebue Area Health Corporation in 1975, Mauneluk Association assumed administration of health programs for the villages of Ambler, Buckland, Deering, Kiana, Kivalina, Kobuk, Kotzebue, Noatak, Noorvik, Selawik, and Shungnak; and in

some cases, Point Hope. One of the most important elements of the Mauneluk health programs has been the village Health Aides who are often the first trained personnel to handle emergency patients. Dennis J. Tiepelman, a 28-year-old Native originally from Deering, has headed the organization since the merger, and has guided the EMS program from no budget at all in FY 1974, to its present \$186,200.

Chuck Greene, a Kotzebue Native, was the first full-time EMS coordinator for Mauneluk Association in 1975 and 1976, and he undertook to organize EMS Councils throughout the region, and to plan for a Basic Life Support program for the Northwest. Daniel Snyder, Jr., of Noorvik (who took over when Chuck Greene became the Association's Health Director) and Jeff Smith did the legwork for a 1203 Basic Life Support program, which is directed by Aggie Lie, EMS coordinator. Aggie Lie is a former Community Health Aide and she works with Katie Robinson, first

aid instructor; Lydia Schuerch, Safety and Accident Prevention Coordinator, and Winnie Reeve and Grace Lincoln, Health Aide Trainer/Coordinators.

The Regional EMS Advisory Council is a masterpiece of coordination in its own right. It includes two groups: eighteen Kotzebue residents comprising fifteen "providers" and three "consumers" of emergency care; and eleven village representatives to the Mauneluk Board of Directors. Each village, in turn, has a Health Board which meets monthly with the local Mauneluk Board members for advice and input.

The recent ambulance donation drive which raised \$23,000 in contributions from all eleven villages within weeks is an example of the benefit of region-wide community support. A sense of interdependence among these residents of the Arctic, where the climate forces inhabitants to cooperate in order to survive, helps Mauneluk Association in its growing efforts to bridge the miles with effective emergency care.