

Could Termination Result?--

Claims Settlement End Federal Health Program?

COLLEGE—If all federal native health programs were cut off, how would Alaskans fair? It's a question that the Secretary of Interior must consider within three years under Alaskan land claims legislation and termination could be the result.

Many native leaders are worried about this possibility and so are scientists at the Arctic Health Research Center at the University of Alaska.

They started considering the problem several years ago, in staff meetings and last year, at the suggestion of Joseph G. Holts, Environmental Sciences Branch, they began planning a massive study.

"The most recent comprehensive health report was made in 1948," notes Dr. Jules B. Cohen, chief of the research center. "This organization has been in existence at least 20 years and all of its information has not been brought up to date . . . not organized in a fashion relative to planning."

The project was planned for fiscal 1972 and allowed for in the AHRC budget. Then the center set out to get backing from the Alaska Federation of Natives, state and federal agencies.

"Once we got the money to do it we could say 'Damn the torpedos, full speed ahead,' but if it was going to be a worthwhile piece of work, we needed the backing of A.N.S., the state Health and Welfare and, not in the least, the A.F.N.," explains Holts.

At first the native leaders did not like the idea.

"They thought we were looking for a way to get the federal people to cut back when really

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we're in the business to see that health service is maintained. They implied we were just stooges of the A.M.A.," Holts recalls.

In answer, the center wrote out its proposal.

"The budgets of the Indian Health Service, the Alaska Department and the AHRC were \$23 million, \$6 million and \$1.5 million respectively during the last fiscal year. The Office of Economic Opportunity disbursed approximately \$1.5 million in the same period," the AHRC researcher noted.

"The cost for the delivery of health service to Alaska Natives is about \$450 per person per year, which is at least one half of the first year's per capita cash allotment to be realized from the settlement of the land claims under the most favorable circumstances proposed.

"It is important, therefore, that the state and federal governments and the AFN be cognizant of the extent of the health problem in Alaska. They should be aware of the years of planning that were required to set up the federal machinery (including the building and staffing of hospitals) for Native health care.

"This functioning system should not be abolished hastily, nor its present funding level be reduced merely because of a land claims settlement. As a case in point, Alaska will recall that federal funding for other Alaskan projects decreased after the state received 900 million dollars in oil lease money."

"Our interest is maintaining health services or improving them," Dr. Cohen adds. "We've observed by congressional psychology after a monetary wind fall and generally funds start becoming tighter.

"We intend to hire several grad students; one to study the history behind other claims settlements and an economist to study economic alternatives."

The center project (which now has native backing) will also cover many other aspects of native health.

Among those working on special reports will be Dr. Frederick A. Milan, anthropologist and chief of the center's Behavioral Sciences Branch; Dr. Robert Rausch, chief of Infectious Disease section; Dr. E. M. Scott, biochemist and chief of Chronic Disease; Dr. John Lee, Public Health Service Director, Alaska Native Health Service and Dr. Martha Wilson, Alaska Native Health Service.

Agencies included in the listing are the State Department of Health and Social Services, Comprehensive Health Advisory Council, Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Health-Right-Project, Office of Economic Opportunity.

Dr. Cohen hopes to have the survey completed well before the Secretary of Interior is required to make his evaluation. The center's work might well save Interior time and money and be an important factor in the decision on termination.