

St. Paul Islanders Form Health Committee To Deal with Alcoholism and Other Problems

Permanent residents of the Aleut community on St. Paul Island in the Pribilofs have set up a program to deal with

their various health problems including those associated with alcohol.

At the villagers' request,

they are being assisted by Dr. Holm Neumann, the U.S. Public Health Service physician assigned there.

Initial steps by the St. Paul Community Council to form a health committee were prompted by difficulties affecting individuals with severe drinking problems.

A workable program was developed, admittedly feasible because of the unique circumstances of the remoteness of the Bering Sea Island community of some 400 persons.

The village operates the local bar and canteen, the only source of alcoholic beverages on the island and thus has total control of how the facilities are used.

Under the village program, persons with serious drinking problems may approach Dr. Neumann for an assessment of their situation.

If applicable, the doctor will sign a statement to the effect that the drinking problem for any such individual is developing into one which is significantly affecting their health—mental, social or physical.

Subsequently, these same persons voluntarily sign a statement placing themselves on "probation at the bar" for a one year period. "Probation" means they will totally abstain from drinking any alcoholic beverages and

will be unable to purchase any alcohol from the community facilities.

These statements are then presented to and passed upon by the village council. If accepted, the council initiates the probation at the bar and canteen.

Any villager who would contribute alcohol to these patients on probation is liable to disciplinary probation by the council.

"This program is a step in the right direction," says Dr. Neumann. "It shows mature judgment on the part of the community council since the bar is one of their largest sources of revenue."

In addition to the council's action, Dr. Neumann makes supportive psycho-therapy available to the probationers.

Meanwhile, the health committee meets periodically with Dr. Neumann to discuss various health problems in the community and to assist with future program planning and with any environmental health or preventive medicine programs such as poison contr.l, well child conferences and cancer detection program.

The health committee is composed of Tikhon Stepetin, community council president; Mrs. Sophia Stepetin, head nursing assistant; and Mrs. Perfenia Pletnikoff, council member.