

Aniak petitions for subregional clinic

by Esther Donhauser

to the Tundra Times

Gwen Brock, who has been in Aniak since 1978, has been trying for at least a year to get a new subregional clinic in Aniak to service nine surrounding Kuskokwim villages from Lower Kalskag up to Stony River and four villages on the Yukon. She started out by getting signed petitions from all these villages stating how much the clinic was needed. "I have talked and met with various individuals at different intervals for a year. The Dept. of Health and Social Services, YKHC, Directors, Coordinators, City Managers, you name it!" said Brock.

Pam Westjohn, City Manager, is presently working with Brock in trying to obtain funds from the

Dept. of Health and Social Services and from the legislature. Pam says that they have gone to the Dept. of Transportation, Division of Aviation to get land by the airport and the Division of Aviation has agreed to this. "If we get a new site, ground-work might begin a year from this summer," said Westjohn.

Getting money for a new clinic, operating budget, physicians assistant, possibly a nurse, an x-ray machine and general medical tools, takes some time and can get confusing. Before getting a grant from the Dept. of Health and Social Services, a new clinic is needed, this money has to be approved by the Legislature next summer, and finally before all else, the new clinic will need land.

"I went down to Juneau and talked to Dwayne Peeples, Coordinator for the Dept. of Health and Social Services, he was very helpful. I also talked to John Hanely, Planner for YKHC, Joe Ryand of P.H.S., and Sue Martin, who travels to villages, these people helped me out." Westjohn said.

Clara Morgan, Supervisor, Instructor for Aniak Clinic, who in 1958 started out as a volunteer Health Aide, worked along with her husband William Morgan. Clara worked out of her house, up until 1970 when Aniak was to get a clinic. "From 1970 to 1973 we had 3 different doctors here in Aniak and we serviced the surrounding villages. From 1980 on we haven't been working with the villages but even after we stopped

being funded, I kept in contact with area health aides and helped them out," said Clara.

Clara stressed the need for a centralized clinic in Aniak. "It would take a big load off Bethel Public Health Service, since they not only take patients from along the Kuskokwim, but the Yukon as well. Not only that, but the cost of transportation for patients would go down," said Clara. According to Brock, two round-trip tickets from Aniak to Anchorage would cost a good \$500 dollars, if the child was 2 years of age or older. People would also be hard pressed for money if they didn't have friends or relatives in Anchorage or Bethel. They would have to pay for room and board, meals, transportation around the city, and if they didn't go to

Alaska Native Center for hospital bills, medication, and more; the whole trip could add up to one months salary for most people. And not everyone has insurance coverage.

Clara also spoke of chronically ill patients "who wouldn't be chronically ill if they'd gone to Bethel or Anchorage in the first place." According to Clara, these people don't always have the money to make those important visits to the doctor-if Aniak had at least one trained physician he or she could see patients here in Aniak. "Weather conditions can be very harsh, an emergency patient could be forced to wait-out a snowstorm, strong winds, or severe icing conditions in their village." added Brock. With Aniak being closer, these patients might have a better chance."

The fact that all the people in the village filled out the petition, gives testimony to the constant need of a closer source of professional, medical facility and personnel.