

WORKING WITH FREE CLINICS

The Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) plans to develop better communication links with free clinics in the United States and to assist them in the delivery of health care services to the people they serve.

According to Dr. Merlin K. DuVal, formerly Assistant Secretary for Health, the action was prompted by recommendations in a report on free clinics by the Department's Office of Youth and Student Affairs. The report, "A General Survey of Free Clinics as Alternatives to Existing Health Care Institutions," resulted from onsite visits to clinics across the country.

Free clinics, which sprang into existence only 5 years ago, presently number approximately 250 and serve an estimated 1.5 million patients a year. Their original purpose was to reach the "flower children" of the late 1960s, but they now serve Chicanos, Blacks, American Indians, Puerto Ricans, the old, the young, women, the poor, and near-poor. To free clinic organizers, the term "free" implies free of eligibility requirements, redtape, moralizing, paternalism, protocol, and fees.

"The report clearly demonstrates the important accomplishments being achieved by free clinics throughout the nation," Dr. DuVal said. "We in the health care field definitely have something to learn from this movement, as well as the responsibility to assist such clinics in the important health role they are playing at the local level. I am personally interested in seeing how we can be of genuine assistance to free clinics without forcing them to become a part of the 'system' and correspondingly negate their strong independent identity."

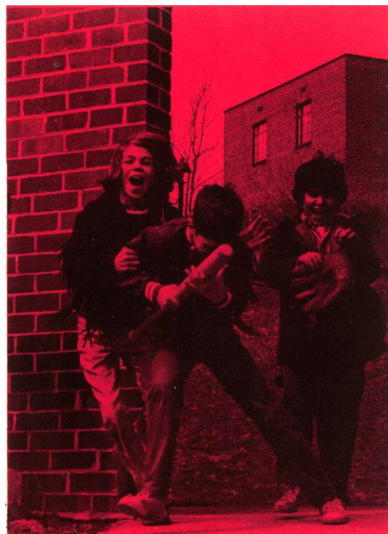
To accomplish this objective, he said, the Department should attempt to develop carefully planned supportive assistance which will not lead to government direction of the way in which the clinics operate.

In response to the report, Dr. DuVal said HEW plans to take the following steps:

- Initiate and maintain communications with free clinics, by encouraging HEW personnel and local health officials to visit the clinics.
- Consider free clinic representatives for relevant public advisory committees, especially those concerned with the health care of young people.
- Examine the feasibility of giving technical and financial assistance to free clinics to develop appropriate health-related educational material for use in community seminars and workshops, and to conduct training activities in mental health, vocational and family planning counseling, and other areas.
- Identify available assistance for the analysis, evaluation, and upgrading of quality standards for services provided by free clinics.
- Determine what government surplus property can be made available to free clinics which qualify and seek such assistance.
- Establish a central point within HEW where regional free clinic associations may apply for multiple grants to support general medical services as well as more specialized services such as drug abuse, family planning, and venereal disease testing.

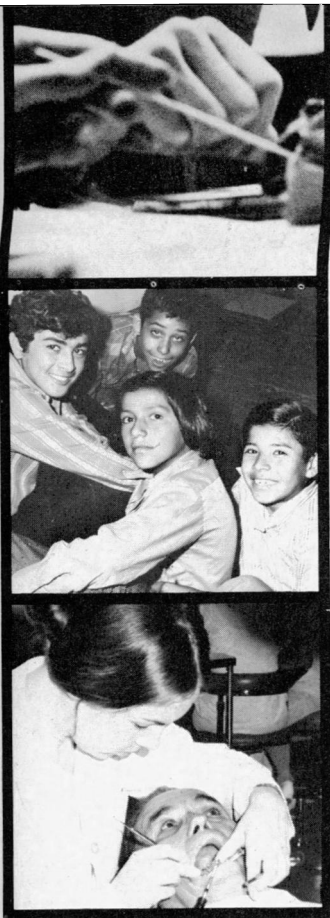
The Health Services and Mental Health Administration has been asked to take the lead in the free clinic initiative and to coordinate programs in the National Institutes of Health and the Food and Drug Administration which relate to free clinics.

Cover: Scene from "Inside/Out," a classroom television series about health and well-being for 8- to 10-year-olds. Programs will deal with problems that have concerned health educators. See the report on the series beginning on page 143. (Photo courtesy of the National Instructional Television Center.)



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