

The National Health Service Corps

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) is almost a decade old. Passed into law in 1970, the NHSC has become a major Federal initiative in the provision of health services to underserved people. The concept is a simple one. The NHSC recruits physicians, dentists, nurse practitioners, physician's assistants, and other health manpower for placement in community-based practices around the country. To be eligible for NHSC assistance, a community must have a demonstrable shortage of health manpower. Using a variety of resources, including local people, local funds, State and county support, and Federal grants, the community establishes the clinic in which the Corps professionals provide service. Currently, there are almost 2,000 NHSC professionals placed around the country.

The NHSC is staffed, in large measure, by graduates of the National Health Service Corps Scholarship Program, which is now in its seventh year of awards. The scholarship program supports health professionals in school in return for a year-for-year commitment of service. Currently, more than 5,000 students are supported.

The idea of the National Health Service Corps is popular, calling forth hundreds of applications from communities around the country and enjoying bipartisan support in

Congress. Increasing numbers of medical, dental, and nursing students interested in community service in return for tuition support are applying for NHSC scholarships. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare projections call for a much expanded NHSC over the next 10 years.

People in many quarters—political, community, scholastic, and administrative—ask the same question, "What is the National Health Service Corps and how does it work?" There is no simple or single answer to that question. Therefore, we have sent seven journalists—all of them veteran reporters—to seven NHSC sites to tell the story of the Corps in action. Their reports, a truly colorful mosaic of the practice of community medicine, are published as a supplement to this issue of *Public Health Reports*. Their narratives span the nation from the Rio Grande Valley to the inner city of Philadelphia, from the Panhandle of Florida to the plains of Montana. Their stories, in sum, tell of the tale of the National Health Service Corps.

Our aim in providing these profiles to the readers of *Public Health Reports* is to expand the understanding of, and interest in, the National Health Service Corps. We hope that you will discover in the Corps a vivacious and committed program of the Public Health Service, which combines the best ele-

ments of scientific technology, humanism, and community service in an effort to complete an as yet unfulfilled American agenda—the provision of quality health services to all of our citizens.

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Service Corps