

Health Program Healthy

By John Becton

CHAPEL HILL — North Carolina's Area Health Education Centers program, which promotes a more balanced distribution of doctors, nurses and other health professionals through decentralized health education, recently had a complete checkup and was found to be healthy and thriving.

The nine year-old program, commonly known as AHEC, is a partnership between the state's four academic medical centers and health professionals throughout the state. It is headquartered in the School of Medicine of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

During a six-month period last year, Dr. Eugene S. Mayer, AHEC director, and members of his staff went to all nine AHEC regions and visited 33 towns from Boone to Southport.

"We asked the faculty at each center to take us to one town in their region in which they thought they were doing well and one in which they thought they could do better," Mayer explained.

Even in towns where the faculty thought improvements were needed, he said, all those interviewed made very impressive statements about how important their AHEC had become.

"We describe AHEC as reaching out from the state's medical schools to the nine centers and from the centers to the local areas," he said. "The reports of people in the small towns show that it really works this way."

Before AHEC was established, Mayer said, health professionals in many communities were rather isolated from their peers. AHEC provides a system by which they can contact a colleague and discuss a problem.

"They do perceive that the faculty members in the regional centers are there to help them," he said.

Through AHEC, health professionals also have access to regular continuing education and to a statewide network of libraries and learning resource centers.

In the last two years, continuing education programs took place in 81 of the state's 100 counties. There were 33,433 participants in programs in medicine; 93,243 participated in all health fields.

Mayer said establishment of the AHEC library network had been an especially important accomplishment. Each AHEC library has a large collection of materials and can provide literature searches and reference services. Materials not in a particular library can be obtained through links with other AHEC libraries, the health science center libraries at one of the state's medical schools or even the National Library of Medicine.

"What was absolutely impressive to me was the next step, extending this to the small towns," Mayer said.

Each AHEC librarian has worked with people in hospitals in each county of the region to develop small, local libraries. Through these, almost any physician in the state has a direct link to the entire AHEC learning resource center network.

AHEC also serves students in medicine and other health fields by providing educational opportunities throughout the state. During 1971-72, 4 per cent of the clinical training of the third and fourth-year students at UNC-CH took place in the AHECs. That has increased to some 30 per cent, and during 1979-80 the number of medical students at AHECs at any given time averaged close to 100.

During his recent AHEC tour, Mayer said he found that in general, physicians were pleased with student rotations.

"Always having students around asking questions keeps you on your toes," he said. "It makes it fun to be a teacher here, and it makes it fun to be a teacher in a small

town."

In addition to making more student rotations available, AHEC also has developed 300 new primary care residency positions across the state. This expansion of undergraduate and graduate medical education parallels a significant improvement in the availability of medical care to all the citizens of North Carolina.

In 1974, there was one active physician for every 996 North Carolinians. By 1980, the ratio had improved to one for every 797. Improvement was recorded in 80 of the state's 100 counties, including 62 classified as non-metropolitan.

Even with the improvements, though, there remain towns that want and need more physicians, Mayer said, and AHEC is addressing the question of what its role should be in the future.

"By 1990, medicine will be in pretty good shape in terms of availability of care," he said. "Yet so long as we have people taking care of people, there always will be the need for practitioners to have the network of professional support that AHEC provides."

Letter To Herald Editor

Sir:

Since May 1981 I have sought information concerning the prepaid subscription fund held by the Biblical Recorder. Funds reported to be \$100,000 at that time. My inquiry has been rejected by the Recorder.

This is nothing new. My concern against Recorder secrecy began in 1978 as I learned of another rejection to inquiry by the Biblical Recorder. Watching the evening news on WBTV in Charlotte I learned a minister in Chapel Hill had sought information concerning an ad that ran in the Recorder. His inquiry was rejected. He sought help from WBTV. Editor Grant was shown on camera saying he forgot who paid for the ad and then refused to allow the reporter to talk to the bookkeeper. I could not believe what I was seeing and hearing. We Baptists pride our open traditions. Also, at this particular time the Recorder was praising the Charlotte Observer for its efforts to make the PTL Club more open and accountable in its operation.

I decided then and there to find out who paid for this ad. I was concerned also. I tried for months to get the information from the Recorder. Later I made several trips to the state board of election office. Because these records are open by law I learned what the Biblical Recorder could have told the minister or WBTV. The ad was paid for by the Congressional Club as a political ad for Jesse Helms' 1978 campaign. Why did the Recorder hide this?

Since that time I have sought to review the advertising income ledger of the Biblical Recorder. I have got no response. I have offered to meet with other Baptist leaders in the Recorder office and specify the area of particular concern, but the latest put-off says I will get a response in May. Does the advertising income ledger hold a secret?

The Biblical Recorder Chairman says the Recorder is too busy at present getting a new editor, the present editor is retiring, and getting a new building, to bother with my concerns. What has been the excuse since 1978?

There is nothing before the Recorder Board as important as an open, fair and truthful operation of our Biblical Recorder. New management and new buildings will not provide these.

Harrill Jones
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Gastonia, N.C. 28502



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GROCEPY	1.79 L
GROCEPY	79 L
GROCEPY	73 L
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