



AUGUST 2, 1996

OIG REPORT 96-67(H)

MEMORANDUM FOR: FEDERAL CO-CHAIRMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Memorandum Survey Report--Review of Selected Health Care
Providers in Georgia

BACKGROUND

This review was undertaken as part of a survey of J-1 visa waiver program operations in the Appalachian Region.

The J-1 visa waiver program provides a waiver of the requirement for a foreign physician to return to his/her home country after completion of medical training in the United States. The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) participates as a Federal entity sponsor to assist Appalachian Region communities in providing health care services to medically underserved areas. The applicable ARC policies and procedures require J-1 physicians to practice 40 hours of primary care per week in a designated Health Profession Shortage Area (HPSA) in the Appalachian Region. The ARC program initially required the physicians to serve at least two years; however, in August 1995 the minimum was changed to three years (unless a state has a longer period.) There is no prohibition on J-1 physicians working extra hours or practicing subspecialties after fulfilling primary care requirements.

Although primary responsibilities for reviewing J-1 visa waiver requests, including supporting documentation, justifications of need, program oversight, and reporting, have been delegated to state health agencies, ARC retains the authority to act on waiver requests and to ensure compliance with program objectives and requirements.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of our review was to determine compliance with ARC J-1 visa waiver program requirements that J-1 physicians perform primary care services in an Appalachian HPSA for 40 hours per week.

RESULTS

We made unannounced visits to two medical facilities in Georgia to review the status of three J-1 physicians. We located one of two physicians approved for Med Now, Inc. in Dalton, Georgia. Dr. Mohammad Al-Sharabi was on vacation at the time of our review, but we met with the other J-1 physician, Dr. Daisy Lim, and with Dr. Steven Foster, the medical director of Med Now, Inc. and Eastside Medical Clinic in Dalton.

Dr. Foster indicated that they closed their Tunnel Hill facility a couple of months before our visit because of a shortage of staff. Tunnel Hill is also a HPSA location. The J-1 physicians work primarily at the Med Now facility, but also see Eastside Medical Clinic patients as needed. Med Now and Eastside Medical Clinic are located in the same building and share the on-site laboratory, x-ray machine, and other equipment. All three of the facilities were noted in ARC records as work sites for the J-1 physicians.


Dr. Foster indicated that Dr. Al-Sharabi would be out of the country until the middle of June 1996. Dr. Al-Sharabi began work for Med Now in October 1995 and has a two-year contract. He works a minimum of 40 hours per week and treats approximately 25-30 patients per day.

Dr. Lim began her employment at Med Now in October 1994 and has a two-year contract. She indicated that she practices primary care and works more than 40 hours per week. She stated that when they are very busy she sees up to eight patients per hour and her daily patient count is between 40 and 60. Because of the heavy clinic workload, Dr. Lim said that only Dr. Foster admits patients to the local hospital, Hamilton Medical Center. Dr. Lim indicated she is satisfied with her employment.

We located the other J-1 physician, Dr. Peter Lee, at the approved site in Hiawasse, Georgia. He joined the practice of Dr. Laneau Hayes in September 1994 and is working under a two-year contract. He indicated he performs more than 40 hours of primary care per week and that he sees about 17 patients on an average day in addition to hospital patients. Medicare and Medicaid patients comprise 95 percent of his practice. Dr. Lee said he has already agreed to extend his contract for another three years.

CONCLUSION

Our field visits concluded that the J-1 physicians were performing in accordance with the provisions of the J-1 waiver program.


Hubert N. Sparks
Inspector General