



SEPTEMBER 30, 1996

OIG REPORT 96-72(H)

MEMORANDUM FOR: FEDERAL CO-CHAIRMAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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

### 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

On August 5-6, 1996 we made unannounced visits to five medical facilities in Tennessee to review the status of nine J-1 physicians (see Appendix). One of the physicians had not arrived at the time of our visit and another one arrived the day of our visit but was not immediately available. Another

physician was sick the day we visited. We located and interviewed the remaining 6 physicians. Four of the six indicated they were working at least 40 hours per week at their approved locations.

On the day of our visit, one physician who had been approved for the Copper Basin Medical Center in Copperhill was working at a new office in Ducktown, Tennessee (a couple of miles away from Copperhill). He indicated that the Medical Center opened the facility May 20, 1996 and that he works there three days a week. He told us he would be working there full-time as soon as he has enough patients to sustain a practice. Currently, he sees a maximum of four to five patients a day in Ducktown and sometimes only two or three. He works in the Copper Basin Medical Center emergency room when he's not at the Ducktown facility. He indicated that the medical center emergency room is more of a general care facility, especially on weekends, and that trauma is not a big part of his caseload.

We visited a J-1 physician in Crossville, Tennessee who entered into an employment contract with the Cumberland Medical Center and a local primary care physician who is now semi-retired. The J-1 joined the practice of the local physician and took over some of his patients. The J-1's sub-specialty is cardiology and we noted that he is listed on the front door as a cardiologist. The local physician told us that the J-1 was recruited primarily as a sub-specialist because the area has sufficient primary care physicians and a growing number of retirees who have cardiology problems. He also told us that patients who come into the office with heart problems are often referred to the J-1 because of his expertise in that area.

The J-1 told us that many of the patients he sees have a history of cardiovascular problems but that he also treats them for other problems such as diabetes, colds, etc. Subsequent to our visit, the physician provided additional information including the types of patients he saw during a specific period, the assignment of patients within his medical group, and the availability of primary and sub-specialty care in the community. He maintains that he is providing primary care in Cumberland County as he agreed to do.

A representative of the Cumberland Medical Center also indicated that the J-1 is a primary care physician who does not do a disproportionate share of cardiology cases. The representative told us that the area has a continuing need for primary care physicians, especially those who will treat Tenn Care patients (Tennessee's managed care plan for Medicaid patients and the working poor). We were told that the J-1 is one of only a few physicians in the county who accept Tenn Care patients. The J-1 physician told us that he takes turns with four other physicians in reading and interpreting echocardiograms at the Medical Center, which he considers to be in addition to providing 40 hours of primary care per week.

## CONCLUSION

We made unannounced visits to five medical facilities in Tennessee to review the status of nine J-1 physicians. One of the physicians had not started work and two were not available the day we visited. We located and held discussions with six of the nine. Four of the six indicated they were providing

at least 40 hours of primary care in their approved locations. We were unable to determine the exact degree of sub-specialty work being done in one case. Another of the J-1 physicians is practicing part-time in Ducktown, Tennessee and part-time at the approved location in Copper Hill, Tennessee. He indicated he would be working full-time in Ducktown as soon as he has enough patients there to sustain a practice.


### RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that ARC officials:

- 1) Reemphasize to the employer and J-1 physician in Crossville, Tennessee with a sub-specialty in cardiology of the need to assure that program provisions and J-1 visa waiver certifications regarding sub-specialty work are fully implemented.
- 2) Remind the employer and physician in Copperhill and Ducktown, Tennessee of the need to notify ARC and state officials when J-1 physicians are assigned to locations not identified in waiver applications.
- 3) Require state officials to fully justify the need for additional physicians before approving any more J-1s for the Crossville/Cumberland County area.

### OBSERVATION

We did not follow up to verify conflicting opinions received about the need for primary care physicians in the Crossville area, but we believe it is appropriate to request that state officials carefully review requests for additional J-1 physicians in that area.

  
Hubert N. Sparks  
Inspector General

Appendix

TENNESSEE J-1 PHYSICIANS REVIEW

Approved Practice Location

J-1 Physician

Copper Basin Medical Center  
Copperhill, Tennessee

Mahmood Siddiqui 1/  
Affan Quadri

Cumberland Medical Center  
Primary Care Center  
Crossville, Tennessee

Maria Bukiron  
Christop Climaco

311 South Main Street  
Crossville, Tennessee

Vianney Villaruz

457 Vista Street  
Sparta, Tennessee

Ahmad Altabba

White County Internal Medicine Clinic  
Sparta, Tennessee

Bela Kosztaczky  
Omar Youssef 1/  
Saad Rahman 2/

1/ Not available at the time of our visit.

2/ Had not arrived at the time of our visit.

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL  
REPORT OF CONTACT

NOTE: This form must be filled in with ink or typewriter.

NAME OF CONTACT:

Bill Jolley, Director

DATE OF CONTACT:  
7-18-96

ADDRESS OF CONTACT:

Tennessee Office of Rural Health  
Cordell Hull Office Bldg. - 5th floor  
426 5th Avenue, North  
Nashville, TN 37247-5245

TELEPHONE NO.:  
615/741-0388

SUBJECT:

Reveiw of Tennessee's J-1 Visa Waiver Physicians

TYPE OF CONTACT:

Personal     Telephone

STATEMENT OF INFORMATION REQUESTED/GIVEN:

Bill said that Daniel Jordan will be off for a few weeks because of some things going on in the office?? and will not be available during our visit. Bill asked which sites we would visit and I told him Sparta and Crossville and one of two nearby sites if time permits. He said he would like to go to Copperhill because he has heard some rumors that there may be problems with the J-1s there. I told him we could go there. (It's in the southeast corner of the state on the border with Georgia.

Bill will plan to meet with us about 1 pm on Monday, Aug. 5th. They moved and <sup>their</sup> new address is noted above. We can send him a copy of the WV report or fax it (615-741-1063). Bill will fax us a map on how to get where he is, a list of hotels nearby and where to park.

He wants to go along for both days. I told him I would be spending the night in Nashville on Monday and in the field on Tues. He said Daniel has been handling the J-1s and he will have to do some homework on the program before we meet.

SIGNATURE:



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