



OCTOBER 22, 1996

OIG REPORT 97-14(H)

MEMORANDUM FOR: FEDERAL CO-CHAIRMAN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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

### 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.) Mississippi internal procedures note a four year requirement for J-1 physicians. 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 seven medical facilities in Mississippi to review the status of ten J-1 physicians. We found that three physicians approved to work at two facilities had not started work at the time of our visit but their employers were awaiting their arrival. Another physician was on vacation on the day of our visit. We located the remaining six physicians.

Drs. Donna Hufana and Lisa Laya are employed by the Byhalia Family Health Center in Byhalia, Mississippi. They have four-year employment contracts. They both indicated they provide a minimum of 40 hours of primary care per week and that patients requiring hospital care are referred to other providers. They estimated that 40-60 percent of their patients are covered by Medicaid or Medicare.

Dr. Carlos Diola is employed at the Chickasaw Family Medical Center in Okolona, Mississippi. His employment contract is for four years and he indicated that he provides a minimum of 40 hours of primary care per week. Medicaid and Medicare patients comprise about 80 percent of his practice.

We also visited with two physicians employed by the Aberdeen-Monroe County Hospital in Aberdeen, Mississippi. Both indicated they have two-year employment contracts and provide a minimum of forty hours of primary care per week. Dr. Noel Garcia told us that about 60 percent of his patients are covered by Medicaid or Medicare. Dr. Tunde Tijani estimated that 99 percent of his patients are covered by Medicaid or Medicare and the other 1 percent is eligible for Medicaid.

Dr. Stanko Vuk is employed by the Pediatric Clinic in West Point, Mississippi. He has a four-year contract and indicated he provides a minimum of 40 hours of primary care per week. About 70 percent of his patients are covered by Medicaid. Dr. Nuray Metin also works at the Pediatric Clinic in West Point; however, he was on vacation at the time of our visit.

The three J-1 physicians who had not begun work at the time of our visit, include Drs. Arif Somjee and Irshad Hussain approved for the Benton Medical Center in Ashland, Mississippi, and Dr. Aurelio Muyot approved for the Tippah County Hospital in Ripley, Mississippi. Staff at the Benton Medical Center indicated their J-1 physicians were expected to begin work soon but they did not know the exact dates they would arrive. Staff at the Tippah County Hospital told us Dr. Muyot was expected to begin work on September 30, 1996.

### CONCLUSION

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

  
Hubert N. Sparks  
Inspector General