



## Survey examines doctor shortages

By John Ortmann

By early November more light will be shed on the chronic shortage of doctors in rural Nebraska, according to Richard Tollefson, a member of the University of Nebraska Medical Center Chancellor's Task Force on Rural Health. Tollefson, a Wausa doctor, said the task force will submit its findings to medical center Chancellor Neal A. Vanselow by Nov. 1.

Tollefson said the task force was charged with finding ways to get more doctors into rural areas and how best to provide health education to rural Nebraskans, he said.

Historically there has been a shortage of doctors in rural Nebraska, and many persons have been forced to travel long distances to get medical care, he said.

Although he declined to comment on the contents of the report, Tollefson outlined the line of inquiry followed in preparing it.

"We had to identify why people don't want to go to rural practice," he said, "why they do want to go to rural practice, why they leave, and why they stay there."

Dr. Robert Wigton, medical center associate dean for graduate medical education, has prepared and mailed a

140 question questionnaire to medical students at the medical center and Creighton University.

He said the questionnaire, prepared for the Nebraska Health Manpower Referral Service, asks for biographical information and opinions about rural life. It also asks students their plans for practice after graduation.

So far, more than 1,100 of the questionnaires have been returned, and interpretations of the results are expected in three to four weeks, Wigton said.

Wigton said that while the percentage of medical school graduates staying in Nebraska has remained nearly the same over the years, the actual number practicing here has increased because of the increased number of graduates.

Nebraska tends to produce more doctors than it attracts, while the Denver area attracts more than it produces, he said. "Maybe Nebraska would do better if it had a mountain," he said.

Wigton said his report may shed light on certain misconceptions about rural practice.

"There have always been a lot of things we believed about rural practice which we don't know are true," he said.

## Rural practice satisfies doctor

For at least one Nebraska doctor, rural life is full and rewarding.

Dr. Roger Massie of Plainview said that after completing his education in Lincoln, Omaha and Oakland, Calif., he never considered practicing in an urban area.

"It was a multi-faceted decision," he said of his move to Plainview six years ago. "I grew up in Friend, and I like that sort of lifestyle. I wanted to get back to clean air, less population pressure and people I could relate to."

Massie said he relates very well to the people in the small northeastern Nebraska town. Outside the office people call him by his first name, which he said is not always a good thing.

"Sometimes you don't always like that," he said, "it tends to negate the distance you like to keep."

The three-doctor Plainview clinic is run on a drop-in basis, with appointments made for Saturday mornings only, when only one doctor is present, he said.

The Plainview doctors still make housecalls when they think a housecall is better for the patient than hospitalization, he said.

Massie said he and his associates handle 90 to 95 percent of the cases they see, with the remainder being sent to urban hospitals.

Massie said he also considers Plainview's proximity to the Missouri river an advantage. Because there are three doctors in town, he has time to get away to fish and hunt on the river, he said.

Plainview is a short distance from Sioux City, Iowa, and Lincoln, he said, which provide shopping and such social activities as UNL football games.

Massie said the only problems he experiences in his practice are "Mickey Mouse" federal standards for hospitals. It is unrealistic to apply the same non-medical standards to a 500-bed urban hospital and a 30-bed hospital such as Plainview's, he said.

Massie said the Plainview Hospital is fully equipped to care for its patients, but that he expects government regulations to become a major problem in the future.

The federal government notwithstanding, Massie said he is happy in Plainview.

"It is fine experience," he said. "I would recommend it to anyone."

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