

Health Center faces changing student needs

by Bill Smitherman

At five a.m. on a cold Wednesday morning the student stands outside a door, watching a television camera and talking to a metal box.

Then a harsh buzzer sounds and the student walks into the hospital of the UNL Health Center. He may be sick with the flu, freaked out on drugs, or have a serious personal problem, but he is on his way to treatment.

IN THE PAST decade there have been many changes at the UNL health center. A service which was called upon ten years ago mainly to set bones and treat colds is now facing the serious challenge of drugs, contraception, unwanted pregnancies and increasing mental problems in a crowded and competitive student society.

The change at NU's Health Center has not been a violent one, but it is evident in all phases of the program. And more change is on the way.

Ten years ago UNL had 8,000 students on its campus. Today, with nearly 21,000 students, the physical facilities of the health center have not changed significantly.

BUT THE services inside the center have changed to meet the needs of today, according to medical director

Dr. S.I. Fuenning.

"In 1961 we didn't have the almost epidemic proportions of venereal disease which we have now," he said. "We also didn't have the changes in student life styles which have brought about the need for contraceptives, drug treatment and, sometimes, abortions."

The sheer increase in the number of students has also brought about problems, he said. As well as a greater number of accidents and illnesses there has been an increase in mental strain from the pressure of existing in a congested community of 21,000.

IN 1961 total visits to the health service clinic were over 27,000 with a total of 2,135 patient hospital days. Clinic visits soared to more than 56,000 in the 1970-71 school year.

Fuenning said that space problems have somewhat hampered development of some needed programs. The current health center was built in 1957 and designed for a campus population of 10,000.

The center today should have the capability of seeing between 400 and 500 patients a day, Fuenning said. The capability at present is between 200 and 300.

THERE IS an obvious need for extension of services and two programs aid in filling this need.

The first program is a system of paramedical personnel called health aides. Aides live on dormitory floors, in Greek houses and in cooperative living units. Trained in first aid and some counseling, they are a campus dweller's closest link to the health service.

The health aide program which began in 1957 was one of the first of its type in the country.

DOCTORS at the center provide a significant referral service when students come to them. But the center last year also instituted a crisis health aide program. This is a telephone-in or come-in service which operates between

6 p.m. and 7 a.m. daily.

The crisis program, which is manned by students who receive training in dealing with telephone crisis intervention, has served as a valuable means of access to treatment and other help in mental problems, illness, drug problems, and other medical crises.

Fuenning said the service has had to work slowly in the area of consumer involvement because it is a new area in medicine. But recently criticism has mounted, particularly among students, that there is not enough consumer input.

THE GREATEST portion of the service fee paid by UNL students goes to the service. This amounts to \$21 per student per semester and students have begun to demand some control over the use of their money.

The Council on Student Life last month instituted a study of student input into the center and how it might be broadened and formalized. Student input now comes from the health aides and from questionnaires mailed to those students who have used the service.

It is the lack of a formal program of student input that has concerned recent investigating groups. A student involved in the investigations contends that most students really don't know what is going on at the health service. This makes it easy for rumors to start which discourage students from ever using the facility.

A GROUP of students which has a formal voice in service policy could be very helpful in communicating with students, she said.

However because the service has made efforts to meet student needs its programs have changed slowly as necessary, Fuenning said. Because of the policy of constant re-evaluation of services the changes at the center have been more evolutionary than revolutionary.

"We have taken most of the new demands and resulting changes in stride," Fuenning said.



Contraception, drugs and minors

by Bill Smitherman

Contraception for unmarried women, abortion, treatment of venereal disease and treatment for drug users are some of the new challenges and demands facing the UNL health service.

But the service seems to have taken these controversial problems in stride and provided solutions through flexible and relatively liberal programs.

"**WE SAW** the changes coming as the result of changes in philosophies and University climate," Dr. Samuel I. Fuenning, service medical

director, said. "We prepared for them."

Fuenning said that since the fall of 1970 student requests for contraceptive pills have increased greatly. In response to this demand the center has established a procedure for all students who want the pill, the medical director said.

A woman who comes to the service for contraception is first counseled about birth control. The various methods and their uses and hazards are explained.

IF THE physician determines that contraceptive pills are medically advisable for the woman she is given a pap

smear (the test for cervical cancer) and a culture test for gonorrhea.

A month after the pills are begun the woman comes back to the center for an evaluation of the effects of the medicine. If all is well she is given a prescription for a year's supply of pills and advised to return for a check-up at the end of the year.

WOMEN are considered for contraceptive pills whether or not they are married, Fuenning said. Most students are considered emancipated and parental permission for the pills is not necessary.

"The woman is counseled and makes her own decision concerning contraception," Fuenning said. "We simply make sure the individual knows what she wants and determine if it is medically advisable to prescribe contraceptives."

There have been some student complaints that they have been told by service personnel that contraceptives are not available for unmarried women under 20. Fuenning said that if this was indeed occurring he would see it was corrected and he reiterated that contraceptives are available regardless of marital status.

THE CHARGE for the contraceptive consultations, examinations and tests is a flat rate of \$15. Though this is significantly lower than private medical services the price has still raised some student questions.

In most office calls to the center a student is not charged. However Fuenning said the charge for the contraceptive service was necessary simply to make it available.

The 50 to 60 contraceptive cases handled each week take

to total of about 80 man hours, the director said. Since the service is currently operating on a deficit budget a charge was necessary to finance the program.

IN VENEREAL disease cases it is possible to get diagnosis and treatment at the service without charge. There is no charge for an office call and tests for venereal disease are free. The state health department provides free antibiotics for treatment.

A Nebraska state law requires that parents of minors under 16 be notified by the doctor if their child has venereal disease. However, there is no law concerning minors over 16 who are emancipated from their parents.

Since most University students are considered emancipated, parents are not notified when students are treated for VD. This makes it much easier for students to come in for treatment, Fuenning said.

STUDENTS who want abortions are not actually counseled by the service. Fuenning said that those who inquire about unwanted pregnancies are referred to agencies where they can get further information and counseling.

In recent years the service has also mounted a drug education program and provided increased treatment for drug users.

Extensive information on drugs is available through the health aides in the living units. The service has also distributed extensive literature on drugs and service staff members are available for lectures and rap sessions on drugs with campus groups and living units.

One problem in the drug program is the wording of a statement contained in a campus handbook which is given to freshmen, Fuenning said.

THE BOOK says, "The illegal use of drugs (including barbituates, hallucinogens, marijuana, etc.) or contributing to such use by others, is in strict violation of University rules and state and federal laws."

This statement is "inaccurate and very deceptive," Fuenning said. Only possession and sales of drugs are in violation of laws. Use is not legally defined as a crime, he said.

However the statement in the handbook makes it sound as if the drug user is breaking strict rules and would probably be turned in by the health service. Fuenning said the drug use cases are not reported to the authorities.

The statement is harmful to both prevention and treatment programs of the service but repeated attempts have failed to get the statement changed, Fuenning said.

THOUGH THE policies of the center are quite liberal for Nebraska there has been no great outcry from the people of the state. This may be that because until recently the doings of the service have received little publicity.

But the NU Board of Regents is currently conducting an investigation into the policies of the service and the resulting report is likely to stir public opinion.

Fuenning defended all of the service's programs saying they are necessary to cope with campus needs. There has been no real opposition to meeting these needs, he added.

Expanded role for center

by Bill Smitherman

Mental health, health education and physical fitness are some of the areas which have increasingly concerned the UNL health center in its quest to meet the demands of a growing student body and changing student needs.

The center also provides some services for the spouses of married students and for faculty and staff. Many of these programs have been expanded in recent years.

A health education program has been growing and two health educators have recently been added to the service staff. The program covers both formal and informal education on many topics concerning health, according to Medical Director Dr. Samuel I. Fuenning.

As well as offering an academic program which offers several classes for credit, the service also provides source people for lectures and rap sessions on topics of drugs, venereal disease, contraception and other areas of interest.

The mental health program at the center has been in operation since 1954. It involves aspects of counseling, social work, psychiatry and psychology.

"We are concerned with treatment of the whole person," Fuenning said. "The central nervous system is just as important as any other system in the body."

The increased student population has necessitated an increase

in the number of staff members. Increasingly busy programs, such as mental health, have also added staff members.

Fuenning said staff has been added most in those areas where it has been needed most. Several doctors have been added to the staff to serve part-time in the clinic service, and a second full-time nurse has been added to the public health division.

Services are primarily concerned with student problems. But some consideration is also made of the spouses of students and of faculty and staff.

Though direct medical care is not available to spouses of students some services are available. A spouse may have prescriptions filled at the health center and may get immunizations at the center. Screening x-rays, diabetes detection tests and consultation on community health resources are also available.

Faculty and staff are treated for work-connected injury and illness at the center. The health service also works with faculty and staff in areas of preventive medicine and environmental health.

Other services available to faculty and staff include screening x-rays, electrocardiogram scans and diabetes detection tests.