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Five begin in March

## Students help doctors

Rural Nebraska towns may soon be getting improved medical services because of the Physicians Assistant (PA) training program at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, according to Jesse Edwards, assistant director.

The PA program, which began at the medical center in March 1973, prepares students for many jobs formerly done by doctors, Edwards said.

The first five students to complete the program will graduate in March.

"Hopefully, this program will give some small towns in Nebraska some relief," Edwards said.

The American Medical Association, which accredited the program, defines a PA as "a skilled person qualified by academic and practical training to provide patient services under the supervision and direction of a licensed physician who is responsible for the performance of that assistant."

### PA's save doctors' time

Edwards said in many cases the PA will make the initial contact with the patient, prepare the medical history, treat minor injuries and perform preliminary diagnostic work, all of which will save time for the physician.

"The patient may not even see the physician," Edwards said. "The PA will be able to handle cuts, abrasions, simple bone breaks, colds and rashes. This will give the physician additional time for more complicated cases and for continuing his education."

Edwards said the PA program should enable doctors to offer better service to their communities and take less time doing it, in addition to providing a more relaxed working atmosphere.

Edwards said there are 45 students in the PA program. He said 11 students are chosen each year from about 125 applicants, all of whom must have accumulated at least 40 hours of college credit.

### Year-round classes

PA students take 90 hours of credit in such classes as anatomy, biochemistry, systems physiology, microbiology and immunology, he said. The program takes two years to complete, he said. Students attend classes all year.

Sixteen weeks of this period is spent in a "community clerkship," or on-the-job clinical training in cooperating rural Nebraska towns, Edwards said.

He said although there are about 50 PA programs nationally, Nebraska's is unique.

### Nebraska program unique

"Nebraska is the only state in the nation that started its PA program totally from state funds," he said. "We now receive \$20,000 in federal funds for a special project, but the remainder of our \$104,000 annual budget comes from the state."

"I think this says a great deal for our legislature. They had an interest in doing something for the people outstate, where medical help is needed," Edwards said.

## Action taken reflects motto of Sierra Club

Nebraska may not be located in the Sierra Nevada Mountains, but it does have its own chapter of the Sierra Club, a national organization for the protection of wilderness areas.

Nebraska clubs organized during the 1960s, according to Ron Kurtzer, chairman of the Bluestem Sierra group. He said this was the first time club membership was offered outside California, where the club started.

Kurtzer said several Nebraska groups formed during this time, including the Missouri Valley, based in Omaha; Pine Ridge, Chadron; Platte Valley, North Platte; and Bluestem, Lincoln.

In 1974 there were enough members to form a state chapter. Kurtzer estimated 500 people belong to the Nebraska Sierra Club.

Kurtzer said the Nebraska chapter was formed "mainly because (Nebraska) is a place of clean air and waters. We want to try to keep things as they are."

### Motto reflected

The motto of the Sierra Club—to explore, enjoy and protect the nation's forests, waters and wilderness—is reflected in action taken by the Nebraska chapter.

Last year, Kurtzer said, the chapter worked with State Sen. Steve Fowler for passage of a bill by the Unicameral permitting only recyclable bottles and cans to be sold in the state. Although the bill was never reported out of committee, Kurtzer said he is "pretty certain" Fowler will introduce a similar bill this session.

The Nebraska chapter filed suit this month to halt the construction of a coal-burning power plant by the Nebraska Public Power District on the Platte River. It's also investigating the legal aspects of the proposed southwest Lincoln bypass, according to Kurtzer. If constructed, the bypass will cut through a corner of Lincoln's Wilderness Park.

### Supports Platte River Plan

Kurtzer said the Sierra Club supports the Army Corps of Engineers' plan to declare the Platte River navigable. The declaration would bring the river under federal control, which would help prevent riverside developments, junked cars in the river and other "objectionable things," he said.

Federal control also might prevent the proposed mid-state Platte River project, another project the chapter opposes. The project would divert river water for irrigation and dry up the Platte several times yearly, Kurtzer said.

Kurtzer said the national Sierra Club will sponsor a canoe trip down the Niobrara River next fall. He noted the week-long trip will help make people aware of the river's scenic beauty, which is threatened by a proposed dam.