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A Community Health Aide in Allakaket

Series: Potlatch series

Program starts with unidentified health aide, most likely Bertha Moses, talking remotely with a doctor in Tanana. She describes the symptoms to the doctor and he prescribes treatment.

An unidentified person asked Bertha Moses how she got started in health care. Bertha Moses said she took first aid training from the priest's wife who was also a nurse. One of her sisters went into labor and she delivered a baby. One of her nephews had a severe cut so her sister sent for her and she was trying to use butterfly stitches. She went up the mission for needles and stitched the wound. She did it because her sister asked her to do it. In 1958 a public health nurse came around and told the nurse at the mission that she would like to train two people to be health aides. The nurse suggested Bertha for training. She talked about the care she gave. They took care of the sick people. They had training with the public health nurse in the evenings. She learned how to give shots. One of her kids had TB and she gave her injections of medication. The interviewer asked about major health problems in Allakaket. The health aide said sanitation and communication are problems. Sanitation is a source of virus spreading. If there is an emergency they don't have a way to call in an airplane. The interviewer asked her about a solution to the sanitation problem. The aide said they needed running water and toilets. She said people need to learn to boil their water and use chloride. They have to be reminded. She said there was a sickness in the fall. They told everyone to boil their water and to wash their hands. The sickness lasted a couple of months in the village. She would like to have a telephone in the village. Satellite radio is not available all the time. Sometimes it is off. A telephone would be the answer. Radios do not work well there. The interviewer asked about having a clinic. The aide said the clinic is supposed to be built by the village people. They really need one. The aide said there isn't enough privacy at her home. Her equipment takes a lot of space in her home. There are some medical things that should be kept confidential and it is hard to talk to patients when other people are listening. The interviewer asked her about the health care policy statement which would put local control over the health care. The aide said she is aware of it, but she hasn't had too much correspondence about it. She said she thinks it is a good idea, she hopes it will solve some problems. It will take lots of planning and work. She talked about medical traffic for her. She usually doesn't leave the house from 10-12 and 1-5 because she is available then. Sometimes people come to get her at other hours. She also keeps records updated and orders supplies. They used to work at all hours. They started specific hours this summer. The interviewer asked her about conditions she treats. The aide said sometimes there is pneumonia, ear infections, colds, and diarrhea. She said most of the time it is ear infections and colds. Most of the times it is not serious. The interviewer asked about emergencies. The aide said sometimes they have cuts she has to stitch. If they need inner stitches she tries to send them out for treatment. A second interviewer asked her how much contact she has with Tanana Hospital. The aide said it is daily but limited. If you miss your chance to talk you may not get a chance to talk with someone that day. You have to limit your talk to allow the other villages time to talk with the doctors. They have about two hours of time on the satellite phone. Sometimes they have an emergency alarm. People may break bones and they contact the doctor. They

usually splint it up until they have contact with the doctors. Last year someone broke their leg and two snow machines left to go to Bettie to have a plane sent. They had to use snow machines to light up the airstrip so the plane could land. They have had several patients with appendicitis. They had to evacuate the patients at night. They had to make contact using an am radio before they had the satellite phone.

An unidentified interviewer asked about the on the job training with the teamsters. The unidentified man said it was really good training. He said they learned how to drive trucks and busses. The interviewer asked how it was like working with the other people. The unidentified person said it was good. The second interviewer asked what life was like in the camp at Prudhoe Bay. The unidentified person said the meals were good, they had good rooms, telephones, and movies. The money was good. He said the unions pay pretty well. They did not allow drinking there. It was a good experience for him. The interviewer asked about the Haul Road. The unidentified man said it will change things. There will be more people coming up the road and making more roads. He doesn't like the idea. He said pretty soon there will be too many people up there. He likes his way of life in Allakaket.