

Midweek Memo, Wednesday, September 24, 2003 article:

USA Creates “Center for Healthy Communities”
To Broaden Local Health Care Participation

With a commitment to enhance and improve health care participation in our community, the University has announced plans to create a Center for Health Communities. The Center will initiate, complement and support education, research, public services and health activities aimed at fostering the elimination of health disparities and enhancing access to health care for medically underserved persons and communities.

“The problem of health disparities will not be solved in this community without the University of South Alabama’s support,” said Dr. Harvey L. White, special assistant to the president at USA. White and Dr. Martha Arrieta, assistant professor in the USA College of Medicine, presented their report Sept. 4 to the USA Board of Trustees. “Our vision is to contribute to the elimination of racial, ethnic, geographic and financial health disparities in our community,” White said.

Health disparities White identified include infectious diseases, cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and endstage renal disease. Compounding the problem is that mortality and morbidity is higher among persons of all living below the poverty level. “In general,” said Arrieta, “population groups that suffer the worst health status are those who have the highest poverty rates and least education.”

“The Center for Healthy Communities is innovative,” said Dr. Robert A. Kreisberg, USA vice president for medical affairs and dean of the University’s College of Medicine. “It will be a credit to our community.”

“The University of South Alabama will be enhanced by the Center for Health Communities,” said University President Gordon Moulton. “The USA Health System is compelled to build bridges and build relationships with people who have special health care needs.”

White said the Center will “proactively engage the African American community,” and will strive to improve African-American participation in the USA Health system. “We will also address geriatric health issues and other minority health concerns, such as those in our growing Asian population.”

The Center’s mission is closely aligned to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Healthy People 2010 agenda and initiatives for underserved individuals and communities.

For example, White and Arrieta have identified a “deprived” population within Mobile County which experiences higher mortality from conditions that are focus areas for Health People 2010, such as HIV, diabetes, hypertension and its complications, cerebrovascular diseases, kidney diseases and cancer; in particular, colorectal and prostate.

“This information can guide interventions aimed at improving the overall health status of the community,” White said. The information will also guide prevention strategies focused on the conditions that increase the risk of death in the deprived group.

Central to the Center's success is the establishment of trusting relationships with minority and underserved populations, health care providers, and scholars within the academic community.

"Our mission will be carried out through collaborative multidisciplinary community and University-based research, education and training programs designed to help develop healthy, sustainable communities," White said.