

MEDICAL CENTER, ST. FRANCIS, HEW AND INTEGRATION
(Originally published July 1966)

The last few months have been trying ones for the administrators and staffs at Medical Center and St. Francis hospitals. There have been inspections after inspections, often two and three a week, by teams from the various agencies and commissions, all related directly or indirectly to the onset of the Federal Government's Medicare. In most instances, the inspections have been prolonged and detailed affairs, carried out at the convenience of the inspecting teams with not much regard for the convenience of the hospitals. The main areas of investigation and contention inevitably have centered on the problems of integration and civil rights. In a few instances, the approach of an individual inspector has been reminiscent of a police state inquisition ("What about so-and-so that happened on April second? You don't recall the incident? Well I have here a paper attested to . . . etc."). Both hospitals have had to submit daily census reports with bed and room assignments indicating race; one has had to write letters of reprimand to individuals and forward copies of these not only to the HEW but to unofficial organizations not connected with government. The attitude on the part of the investigators has not been one to encourage cooperation.

"Nothing in this title," begins Section 1801 of Title XVIII, Health Insurance for the Aged, "shall be construed to authorize any Federal officer or employee to exercise any supervision or control over the practice of medicine or the manner in which medical services are provided, or over the selection, tenure, or compensation of any officer or employee of any institution, agency or person providing health services, or to exercise any supervision or control over the administration or operation of any such institution, agency or person."

This of course sounds fine, but, as both hospitals have learned, the HEW's interpretation of what does or does not constitute "supervision and control" is largely a one-sided affair.

The Medical Center, a city-county tax-supported institution, has long been involved in local, state and federal medical assistance programs. It has no choice but to comply in the Medicare program. It has been conscientiously doing its best to meet the requirements. St. Francis Hospital, a private, church-affiliated institution, has no such State or Federal Government obligations. However, it too has agreed to comply and has done its best to meet the requirements, although in the opinion of its medical executive committee, there is little to be gained by doing so.

The situation was commented upon quite well in a recent column by Editor Millard Grimes of the *Enquirer*. A portion of the column, titled "Now, Integration Above Health," is reprinted here:

"Hospital administrators who are sincerely anxious to meet the federal regulations have found themselves frustrated because of the stringent requirements laid down by federal inspectors.

"The U.S. Office of Education has demonstrated that it is more interested in integration than orderly education. Now the Health Department seems determined to prove that it places integration above treatment of the sick.

"A hospital is the last place you would think suitable for sociological experiments. Sick persons already have enough trouble without throwing them into tense situations over which they have no control.

"An emotional upset, even if it is the result of prejudice, is bad treatment for a sick person. Negro patients, as well as white, undoubtedly find themselves more relaxed in a room by themselves, but if they must be in a room with another patient, I imagine they prefer a roommate who is as compatible as possible.

"Secretary Gardner says the local hospitals will cut off their own funds by not following federal requirements. But that's simply a fancy way of saying it. Local hospitals will be doing the best they can, because their officials for the most part are dedicated to the treatment and curing of every patient who seeks admittance, whatever their color.

"But if they fail to dot every "i" and cross every "t," and thus lose their federal funds, the burden of that loss will lie at the federal doorstep, and the lives and health of those endangered white and colored will be answerable to the officials of the Health, Education and Welfare Department."

(c) *The Bulletin of the Muscogee County (Georgia) Medical Society*, "The Doctor's Lounge", Jul 1966, Vol. XIII No. 7, p.11