

CHAPTER 4. A LOOK AHEAD

EXPANDING DEMAND FOR MEDICAL CARE

1. The increase of the population of the United States to an estimated 196 million in 1965 and 214 million in 1970 will raise demand for a greater quantity of medical care. Rising national income and rising per capita income, bringing rising standards of living, will also raise the demand for a greater quantity of medical care.

2. Increasing awareness of health and medical care needs will stimulate demand for a greater quantity of medical care and a higher quality of medical care. Rising expectations for improved medical care generate support for medical research and public action to increase the availability of medical care.

3. Rising demand for medical care generates private and public action to finance medical care. Private action appears in the growth of voluntary health insurance, which now pays about 25 percent of the private medical care bill and will pay an increasing proportion in the future. Public action appears in tax-supported programs to provide medical care for special segments of the population and in tax-supported medical research programs.

INADEQUACIES OF SUPPLY

1. The supply of medical doctors in relation to the population has been falling. Since 1949, the ratio of M.D. physicians declined from 135 per 100,000 to an estimated 132.7 per 100,000 population in 1959. The Public Health Service has estimated ⁵⁷ that the ratio will fall to 130.5 per 100,000 population in 1970 and to 125.9 medical doctors per 100,000 population in 1975, if the number of graduates of U.S. medical schools does not increase above the level currently predicted.

2. The supply of dentists in relation to population has been stable, but the Public Health Service estimates the ratio will drop from 57 dentists per 100,000 population currently to 54.5 dentists per 100,000 population in 1965, to 52.8 in 1970, and to 50.2 in 1975, on the basis of currently predicted output of dental school graduates.⁵⁸

3. The supply of health facilities and the supply of hospital beds judged acceptable by Public Health Service standards are inadequate in terms of rising population and increased demand. To meet the needs of the prospective population, 265,000 hospital beds will be required within the next 10 years ⁵⁹ in addition to the existing 1.5 million hospital beds. The supply of nonhospital health facilities offering alternative services for health and medical care, such as public health centers, nursing homes, mental health clinics, and physical therapy and diagnostic centers, can alleviate the shortage of hospital beds; at the present time, the backlog of demand for these alternative health facilities far exceeds their supply.

CONTINUING PRICE INFLATION

1. Expanding demand for medical care and continuing inadequacies in supply of personnel and facilities providing medical care have contributed to rising prices of medical care services. This price inflation

⁵⁷ "Health Manpower Source Book," sec. 9, p. 31.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁹ "The Nation's Health Facilities," p. 31.