

During the Congressional hearings on this bill, representatives of major groups and institutions with an interest in the American health system were heard, particularly spokesmen for practicing physicians and community hospitals of the Nation. The Act which emerged turned away from the idea of a detailed Federal blueprint for action. Specifically, the network of "regional centers" recommended earlier by the President's Commission was replaced by a concept of "regional cooperative arrangements" among existing health resources. The Act establishes a system of grants to enable representatives of health resources to exercise initiative to identify and meet local needs within the area of the categorical diseases through a broadly defined process. Recognition of geographical and societal diversities within the United States was the main reason for this approach, and spokesmen for the Nation's health resources who testified during the hearings strengthened the case for local initiative. Thus the degree to which the various Regional Medical Programs meet the objectives of The Act will provide a measure of how well local health resources can take the initiative and work together to improve patient care for heart disease, cancer, stroke and related diseases at the local level.

The Act is intended to provide the means for conveying to the medical institutions and professions of the Nation the latest advances in medical science for diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of patients afflicted with heart disease, cancer, stroke, or related diseases—and to prevent these diseases. The grants authorized by The Act are to encourage and assist in the establishment of regional cooperative arrangements among medical schools, research institutions, hospitals, and other medical institutions and agencies to achieve these ends by research, education, and demonstrations of patient care. Through these means, the programs authorized by The Act are also intended to improve generally the health manpower and facilities of the Nation.

In the two years since the President signed The Act, broadly representative groups have organized themselves to conduct Regional Medical Programs in more than 50 Regions which they themselves have defined. These Regions encompass the Nation's population. They have been formed by the organizing groups using functional as well as geographic criteria. These Regions include combinations of entire states (e.g. the Washington-Alaska Region), portions of several states (e.g. the Intermountain Region includes Utah and sections of Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada and Wyoming), single states (e.g. Georgia), and portions of states around a metropolitan center (e.g. the Rochester Region which includes the city and 11 surrounding counties). Within these Regional Programs, a wide variety of organization structures have been developed, including executive and planning committees, categorical disease task forces, and community and other types of sub-regional advisory committees.

Regions first may receive planning grants from the Division of Regional Medical Programs, and then may be awarded operational grants to fund activities planned with initial and subsequent planning