

July 27, 1959

The President
The White House
Washington 25, D. C.

Dear Mr. President:

The Nation is facing a growing shortage which will reach 15,000 physicians and 15,000 dentists by 1975. This prospect imperils the maintenance of today's health standards for our growing and changing population, in terms of the level, quality, and distribution of the Nation's health and medical care services.

These are not guesses, but firm estimates. They are based on two factors that can be predicted with a high degree of accuracy: population increases and the ratio of physicians and dentists to population--ratios which, incidentally, have remained fairly constant during the past twenty-five years. Moreover, the increasing proportion of older people and infants in our total population will place even greater burdens on those who must provide adequate medical and dental care for the American people.

When I point out that the Federal government has a responsibility to act now in order to meet this crisis, I am fully aware of your views that such responsibility should be borne by private or State sources if possible or, at the very most, shared by private and public sources. I would certainly concur in general with these views. The cold fact, however, is that the responsibility to act now in anticipation of future needs is being met at present by no one, and the threat of an inadequate number of doctors and dentists in the future comes even closer to being a reality.

Let me cite a few statistics.

.....There are 235,000 physicians and 99,000 dentists in practice in the United States today.

.....Calculated on the basis of population growth and existing ratios of doctors to population, we will need 311,000 physicians and 133,000 dentists by 1975.

.....If presently predicted graduation rates continue, and if death rates follow present patterns, there will be only 296,000 physicians and 118,000 dentists in 1975.

.....Our present medical schools (85) and dental schools (47) estimate that even under optimum conditions, including a reasonable and continuing expansion of Federal aid through existing programs, they would not be able to increase the size of today's graduating classes by an amount which could possibly bridge this gap.

.....Thus, at best, unless something is done about it now, the Nation faces a serious shortage both of physicians and dentists. Regardless of what is done, it takes 6 to 10 years to establish new schools and graduate a first class. This means that we must take immediate action to safeguard a situation a decade from now.

This issue has been placed before the Congress and the Administration time and time again, but resultant legislative proposals, originating both in the Executive Branch and in the Congress, have not been enacted. It must be assumed that the problem has not been adequately presented to the Congress and that the Administration has not had the conviction to press the issue as forcefully as the situation demands. The most recent Administration bill in this field, for example, introduced during the 85th Congress last year, has not been re-introduced this year.

The immediate and apparent need is twofold: funds to assist in the construction of new facilities for medical and dental education, and funds to defray certain of the general operating expenses of the medical and dental schools. This latter need, if it is to be met, raises a fundamental policy issue of Federal aid to medical and related education, and may have to be deferred until a clearcut national policy emerges. But the other priority need--new construction--can be met now.

I urge you to exert your influence both within the Executive Branch and in the Congress to the end that suitable legislation be enacted and adequate funds appropriated to help meet this challenge to the people's health. The record on hospital and research facilities construction gives ample evidence that if the Federal Government asserts some leadership and assumes a share of the responsibility, there will be parallel support from nonfederal sources.

It is not enough to help today's schools modernize their facilities. We must also stimulate their expansion and encourage the creation of new schools of medicine and dentistry. This can be done by making separate funds available for new construction and by providing more attractive matching provisions for increases in capacity. There is a great deal of latent interest in the new-school concept, awaiting the tangible demonstration of Federal interest to encourage State, local, and private creation and financing of such new national resources.

I have recently introduced into the Congress a bill--H.R. 6906-- which seeks to provide Federal matching grants for the construction of educational facilities at the medical, dental, and related institutions. It calls for making \$250 million available for expansion and improvement of existing schools over a 5-year period and \$100 million over a 10-year period for the construction of new schools.'

I hold no special brief for my proposed legislation, Mr. President. If there are better ways to do the job, they will certainly have my support.

I have seen estimates that it will take at least a billion dollars in construction funds to make the Nation's medical and dental school facilities adequate for the challenges that lie ahead. It is my belief that these long-range needs must be met. And it is my conviction that they must be met now. All of us know how long it takes to build a new school and graduate its first class. It may already be too late to avoid shortages in some areas. But there is still time to avert a major catastrophe.

The alternative is unthinkable in our society, which rightfully looks to the leaders of today to take reasonable steps to protect the health of our citizens in the future.

I have not raised any question here about the Nation's medical and dental research effort, which is closely related to medical and dental education. In contrast with the educational picture, there has been gratifying progress in our research attack on the problems of health and disease in man. Research support has increased and broadened, research training programs bring a steady flow of scientific manpower into the field, and modern research facilities are being built. I am firmly convinced that progress in medical and related research must be sustained. But I am also concerned that the knowledge derived from such research be widely and effectively used. This cannot be the case if there are not enough physicians, dentists, and other professionally trained health workers to meet the people's needs.

It is for this reason that I feel we must approach the problems of medical education and the Nation's medical care and health services with the same vigor, boldness, and sense of national responsibility that has made possible our achievements in medical research.

Kindest regards,

Sincerely,

John E. Fogarty, M. C.