

Third, since a considerable amount of planning is already being done for a number of projects, hospital authorities, counties, and municipalities, which affects the community's health picture, ways must be found to make maximum use of this capability, and coordinate it into a community-wide comprehensive planning effort. Finally, planning must preserve and encourage the highest level of professional competence in the entire health system, and must make use of the insights of all concerned in the community health system.

The overall task of putting together such an organization is thus seen to be a problem in "systems" analysis and development. Since the total resources of the community are likely to remain smaller than the demands which an ideal health system will place on the resources, rational and just methods of assigning priorities to the various needs must be developed. A cost-benefit analysis is essential to any such decision process, and, considering the literally hundreds of specific health needs in the community, it is likely that the cost-benefit model must rather soon make use of modern computer techniques.

The Partnership for Health law requires that such planning be done with people rather than for people. Therefore, maximum participation of health "consumers", health professionals, governmental units and agencies, and other community organizations is a necessity. The law is telling the States and communities that they will be given increasing responsibility and power to determine their own best health interests, and that the current Federal practice of funding health-related projects through specific project-type grants (such as for specific facilities and specific disease processes) will phase into a system of "block" grants to the states for use as local emphasis requires. Eventually, only communities which have organized themselves for comprehensive health planning may be eligible to receive Federal support.

The current Atlanta area project is a pioneering effort. No other communities in the country have progressed far enough along these lines to provide patterns as to what we should do (or avoid). We have an opportunity to be of service not only to our own community, but to others as well.