## 20 Days—Then Get Out!

Physicians, health-care officials, and state and local legislators across the nation are bemoaning slashes in federal and state health care programs. Apparently the moans will grow louder before quiet comes as the cuts become a reality or inch closer to it.

When Ronald Reagan swept into the Presidency of the United States in November of 1980, he rode high on a promised wave of fiscal responsibility and less government spending. To some health-care officials, that wave has assumed tidalwave proportions that are about to sweep poor people and minorities out to sea in face of serious cutbacks in medical services and programs.

Proposed federal cutbacks, totaling more than a billion and a half dollars, are sending shock-waves throughout the medical community with some officials predicting losses in Medicaid program funds will mean:

Loss of equal access to
quality health care for all
regardless of race and income
Loss of personalized medical
care and treatment at neigh-

borhood and commu

— Loss of freedom - of-choice by citizens of where to go to receive affordable medical care

— Loss of commitments to the prevention of disease and the promotion of health as national goals

A Baltimore, Maryland physician said the hard times have already arrived in his city. The above, predicted losses are real, not a scenario about to be acted out.

Dr. Oakley H. Saunders is vice president and director of Medical Affairs at Provident Hospital, Inc. on Baltimore's predominately black Northwest side. Saunders said Provident is a "microcosm of institutions that serve primarily low-income people, particularly minorities."

Provident's patient population, reflects that of many inner city hospitals, he said. More than 50 percent of its patients receive Medicaid, and in the face of actual and proposed budget cuts, the high percentages could spell diaster.

Saunders said he blamed federal government policies that are impacting how the states operate their health care programs. The same policies will

One immediate effect of the recent budget cuts has been the reduction of hospital services to Medicaid patients. In Maryland, hospitals are limited to only 20 days of inpatient care.



Provident Hospital in Baltimore. Already feeling the effects of the budget cut squeeze.

determine whether hospitals such as Provident will operate in the future.

"The (Federal) government is laying the groundwork to close us down under the label of fiscal prudence," he said. "Private and medium-sized hospitals with a large percentage of Medicaid patients are going to have a difficult time."

A portion of Provident's dif-

business. And, if the hospital were to close its doors, the community would lose 1,000 jobs, more than a \$20 million a year budget education and training opportunities for young physicians and dentist of color through training programs, he said.

"If we lose this kind of thing, we'll be in damned bad shape," Saunders said.

## By Patricia A. Tatum

ficulties lie in a 20-day limit of Medicaid payments for in-patient hospital care. The State of Maryland recently imposed the limit to hold down rising health care costs and to fruther avoid making cuts in medical services to the state's residents that are paid by Medicaid.

Several years ago, in a similar cost cutting measure, Maryland stopped using Medicaid funds to pay for adult dental care except in emergencies.

Saunders said he is deeply concerned about the 20-day limit. It will eventually drive hospitals such as Provident out of

The 20-day limit on Medicaid patients for any illness poses a dilemma for the hospital. Provident can either evict a patient after the limit is up or treat the patient until care is no longer needed and face the prospect of not getting paid for its services by the state or federal government.

"We can't put a patient out on the street who's sick," Saunders said.

By treating large numbers of Medicaid patients, hospitals such as Provident will bring upon themselves a "significant bad debt." State and federal officials



Dr. Oakley Saunders

will point accusing fingers at the hospitals, telling them they are high cost agencies.

The states, as they try to hold down health care costs and try to provide efficient health care to its citizens, may turn to private entrepreneurs such as the large medical group, the Chesapeake Physician's Association in Baltimore, "to contract exclusively with the state to take care of poor people," Saunders said.

Hospitals such as Provident will lose a large percentage of their patients and "poor people will not have the free choice" of where to go to get medical care, he said.

Saunders said he shudders when he thinks of the lowest bidder getting a health care contract. It has nothing to do with quality health care, he said.

community hospital that sees a significant number of low-income patients faces a most uncertain future. It has nothing to do with professional capability. It has to do with fiscal and political policy," Saunders said.

Echoing Saunders concern is Maryland state delegate, Larry Young. In remarks before a group of Baltimore health educators, Young said the Reagan administration is taking steps to create a "separate and unequal" society because of the severity of the health care program cuts.

Young said health care programs will be pitted against each other in times to come as constituencies try to reduce funding even as the need for funds increase.

How serious are the health care cuts Saunders and Young (Continued on Page 19)



You loved it as a kid. You trust it as a mother. Kool-Aid

That special fruity taste...kids today love it as much as you did.

That's a good reason to serve Kool-Aid® Brand Unsweetened Soft Drink



Mix instead of soda. Vitamin C is another. And with your sugar, Kool-Aid is one-third the price of soda.\*