



THE SECRETARY OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

OCT 11 1990

Hector P. Garcia, M.D.
Member of the American Medical Association
and Founder of American GI Forum
1315 Bright Street
Corpus Christi, Texas 78405

Dear Dr. Garcia:

Thank you for your letter regarding issues related to the conditions affecting the U.S. - Mexico border. Your letter presents a vivid description of the extent of the problems along the border. I regret that my schedule has not permitted me to visit the "colonias."

I am familiar with and share your concern about the sanitation problems which exist at the colonias. While the Department of Health and Human Services does not have grants or loans for water and sewage projects, other Federal agencies do, among them the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); in fact, both the EPA and USDA have recently undertaken to establish new grant money for projects to improve conditions at the colonias.

Let me assure you that the Department is committed to addressing the health problems in communities along the U.S. -Mexico border. There have been many efforts over the past several years, however, such efforts are particularly complicated due to the binational nature of these communities. At present, the Public Health Service (PHS) is taking the lead in making renewed effort to deal with this well-recognized medically underserved area. A task force has been formed to formulate issues and develop strategies to address the health needs of this region.

Dr. James O. Mason, Assistant Secretary for Health, presented some of the preliminary recommendations of this group at the June 3 annual meeting of the United States/Mexico Border Health Association. One of these is to provide for a new assessment of health priorities through a series of consensus conferences involving State and local officials from both sides of the border. These conferences are designed to provide an updated binational consensus on what our key problems are and what best approaches we might take to act on them. The first such consensus conference is planned this winter.

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In addition, the Bureau of Health Professions, a component of the Health Resources and Services Administration, has recently implemented a Health Education and Training Center (HETC) program. This year, \$3.8 million has been appropriated for this program and 50 percent of the appropriated funds must be made available for approved applications for border HETCs.

The HETCs will engage in a broad range of activities, including conducting training and education programs for physicians and nurses; conducting or supporting health education services; conducting or supporting continuing medical education programs; supporting health career educational opportunities activities; providing technical assistance; encouraging health promotion and disease prevention activities; and, in the case of border HETCs, coordinating activities with similar programs carried out on the Mexican side of the border.

Let me close by saying that I am deeply moved by the determination of these proud people, and I sincerely hope that the combined efforts of the Federal and State governments and private institutions, as well as the concern of private citizens such as yourself, will help to improve the living conditions in the colonias.

I appreciate your sharing your views with me on this important subject.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Louis W. Sullivan".

Louis W. Sullivan, M.D.
Secretary