

Caring for Student Bodies: Exploring the History of NIU Health Services

Timeline

February 11, 1970 – Pharmacists needs to be hired

September 30, 1971 – Advisory group for clinic formed

October 1, 1971 – NIU limits pill to married women

October 12, 1971 – Minister’s estimate ‘Many abortions at NIU’

October 25, 1971 – President gets help from Planned Parenthood Association in Chicago to search for a gynecologist

October 26, 1971 – Gynecologist search begins

November 18, 1971 – Candidate for NIU Gynecologist visits

September 5, 1972 – A letter of complaint to the Loren Akers. Ronald Wagener is an employee that is complaining about the constant hiring of staff that isn’t qualified to do their job.

March 3, 1972 – Two gynecologists hired

March 22, 1972 – Birth control was legalized nationally

April 27, 1972 – New birth control aid announced

January 22, 1973 – Abortions legalized

March 2, 1977 – NIU student, Ronald M. Pietrzak, dies

November 16, 1981 – Drugs supplied for fake symptoms

December 8, 1981 – Rep calls for investigation

December 9, 1981 – ACLU gives NIU an ultimatum

December 10, 1981 – Star reporter charges dropped

State might start investigation

January 12, 1982 – Health Center Probe completed

January 14, 1982 – Medical team oks Health Center

Analysis

Starting around the 70s, the Health Services started to begin adding and hiring different kinds of services in order to better serve their students. It began in February 11, 1970, when the Health Services started to look for a pharmacist. Throughout the decade, the Health Services had a very common theme of not having enough funding when looking for new additions for the Health Services. For instance, on September 5, 1972, a complaint letter was sent to Loren Akers, the Health Services Director at the time, regarding the qualifications of certain individuals that were employed by the Health Services. Additionally, when the Health Services were looking into hiring a gynecologist in 1971, it was a very difficult process because since their budget was very limited, Northern Illinois University wasn't able to offer a decent salary. The school was offering a salary of \$30,000, but Gynecologist during that era could make up \$75,000. So it was evident when NIU ended up having a lot of trouble with finding someone to fill in the position. Eventually NIU was able to hire gynecologist. However, instead of finding one full-time gynecologist, they hired two part-time gynecologist. Which may be because of the salary constraint.

Also during the 70s, there were a lot of feminist movements happening around the U.S., the spirit of activism also came to NIU. A student women's group that was running at the time pushed for the school to hire a full-time gynecologist. During this time as well, there were a lot of illegal abortions that occurred at NIU. I wasn't able to find who was the one that conducted the illegal abortions, but an article from the Northern Stars said that a pastor from the Wesleyan foundation had worked with a lot of women that received abortions illegally when they were students at NIU. The pastor mentioned it was mostly Black women and Catholic women that

looked to receive illegal abortions. The reason for this, is because during the time the only state that you can receive abortions was in New York. A lot of women weren't able to afford the trip in order to receive the abortions, which is why they end up for the cheaper, unsafe manner. The pastor at the time would give these women support (emotionally, medically, etc.) since complications could arise from the abortions, but they were unable to go to the doctors in fear of being trialed. Also, during this time, the director of the Health Services was not favored within these women groups, because there are claims of the director would say misogynistic things whenever speaking about menstrual pain. Saying certain things such as "it's all in your head." Regarding birth control, NIU also had a hard time with making it available to their students. At the time, the Health Center only dispensed birth control to women that are married or engaged. Of course, the school only implemented this restriction, in order to lower the cost of dispensing birth control. It wasn't until March 22, 1972, when birth control was legalized nationally that the Health Center began a plan to make birth control more available to students regardless of marital status.

On November 16, 1981, a very big scandal started between the Health Center and the Northern Star. This scandal went on for 3 months. Basically, the Northern Star came out with an article that said that four reporters came to the Health Center looking to get medication for menstrual pain. There had been a rumour that the Health Center would prescribe Valium, so they wanted to investigate these allegations. The reporters went in and claimed they had menstrual cramps, but they really didn't. All four reporters got prescribed different medications. One reporter got 5-milligrams of Librium, a tranquilizer, and 50-milligram of Visatril, a sedative. One reporter was prescribed 50-milligram Seconal, a sedative. Another reporter received a prescription for 30-milligrams of Dalmane, a sedative. Immediately after the publication of this

article, NIU began to receive immense push back. Afterwards, the president at the time, William R. Monat, wanted to trial them, because he claimed that it was a false accusation and an excuse for petty journalism. The reporters were at risk for being kicked out of school. Eventually the ACLU got involved in the case, because they claimed that it was a “violation of their First Amendment right to freedom of press.” The day after ACLU gave NIU an ultimatum, the charges were dropped. Even after the charges were dropped, the state wanted to investigate the Health Center to make sure that everything is up to code. About 2 weeks later, the state approved the Health Center and everything was up to par.

