

Ex-U.S. health chief pushes medical alliance

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Dr. Louis W. Sullivan sees too few black undergraduates seeking to become doctors and nurses.

As a medical educator, he's eager to change that situation to ensure that the future supply of black medical professionals will grow to meet mounting health challenges in Black America.

That's why the former U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Resources flew into Richmond last week.

"I'm here to kick off the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance," the 71-year-old physician

and educator who served as the nation's top health official in the administration of President George Herbert Bush, father of the current president.

Based in Richmond, the alliance is a new initiative aimed at encouraging undergraduates at historically black colleges and universities in the state to seek careers in medicine, said the retired president of the Morehouse School of Medicine.

In an interview at the Free Press offices last Friday, Dr. Sullivan said the alliance has been organized to link such students to the medical schools at the University of Nebraska and Virginia Commonwealth

University. Dr. Sullivan was interviewed after a meeting with Free Press Editor/Publisher Ray Boone.

Under the Alliance program, talented students from the HBCUs and a Richmond community college would receive stipends to work on research projects with mentoring medical faculty from the medical schools, said Dr. Sullivan, who has agreed to be the chairman and chief executive for the new initiative.

The program is aimed at helping students to see the opportunities and raise their chances to succeed in gaining entry into graduate medical programs, said Dr. Sullivan.

Along with the two medical schools, the alliance schools include: Hampton, Norfolk State, Virginia State and Virginia Union universities, St. Paul's College and J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College.

The schools reached agreement with the two medical schools last September on setting up the initiative. Dr. Sullivan said the meeting last Friday was aimed at updating progress on the schools' efforts to recruit students to participate and medical schools' efforts to provide research slots.

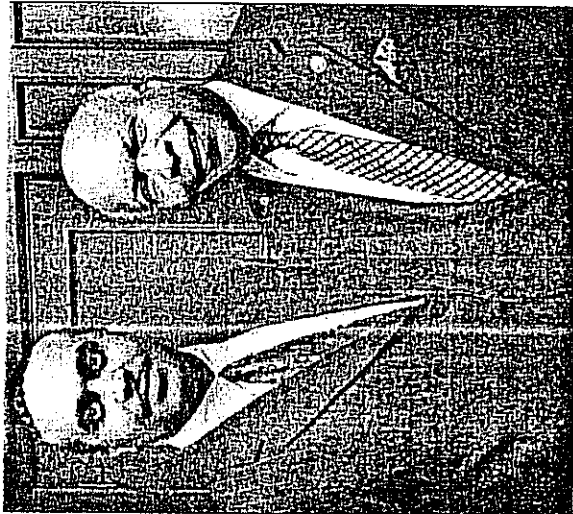
If all goes well, up to 18 Virginia students could get research stipends this summer to start the program.

"We are starting small. But we are doing so because we want to ensure we will succeed," Dr. Sullivan said.

Terone B. Green, a vice president of VCU's health insurance program, Virginia Premier, has been tapped as chief administrative officer to Dr. Sullivan and will run day-to-day operations in the Richmond office of the program.

Dr. Sullivan believes this unique alliance could create the desired payoff of helping to boost minority professionals in the medical field, he said. Today, only 6 percent of the nation's physicians and 9 percent of the nurses come from black and Hispanic groups in a country whose population is 25 percent minority.

Dr. Sullivan said attracting more minority health care professionals is one of the best ways to end the disparity in health



Junimo Reid for Richmond Free Press

Dr. Louis W. Sullivan, right, and Terone B. Green, who has been tapped to run the Richmond office of an initiative designed to recruit more minorities to seek careers in medicine.

care that leads to shorter life expectancies for black and Hispanic people.

Along with recruiting talented students, the alliance also will seek to strengthen science and math faculties at the HBCUs by having some teachers receive research stipends to work with counterparts at the two medical schools.

The University of Nebraska Medical School has committed \$1 million over four years to help launch the program and Virginia supporters are seeking state funds to help match that commitment.

The chairman of presidential advisory councils on black colleges and on AIDS and leader of a private commission on diversity in health care, Dr. Sullivan is now seeking grants and corporate support to help ensure the future of the program.

If all goes well, he sees the Virginia-Nebraska Alliance serving as a model for linking predominantly black schools to medical centers that also are interested in diversifying their medical students