

cians, nurse practitioners and health educators.

Rutgers' health centers faced annual cuts from 3 to 14 percent over the last five years, according to Dr. Robert Bierman, director of medical centers. To cover these state cuts, which averaged about \$50,000 each year and reached a one-year high of more than \$200,000, Rutgers raised student fees, took money from a reserve savings account and froze hiring on certain positions.

Tight budgets forced the centers to become more efficient, and Bierman acknowledges, "We're very close to the point where something major would have to be given up."

A PRESCRIPTION FOR BETTER CARE

Without a regulatory system for college health care, determining the adequacy of campus clinics often falls on students' shoulders. Taking a tour of the center, meeting with physicians and talking to other students can provide some basic information. Accreditation is a good sign that the center will offer care comparable to what is available in the community. If the center is licensed, the state requires it to adhere to certain standards, and every physician in the country must be licensed to practice.

If the center is unresponsive to complaints, students can turn to the university's student affairs office or to their student health advisory committee.

Those who are uncomfortable with the diagnoses or treatment provided at their center should seek a second opinion at an outside hospital.

Dan Maier, director of news and information at the American Medical Association, recommends finding a primary care physician before you need one. "Ask your friends... if there's a good physician in the area and go into the office and meet with them," he says.

Every state and county has a medical society which can offer referrals. The society can let students know if a physician is board-certified, which shows he or she has proven expertise beyond what is necessary for state licensing.

Maier also recommends pricing health insurance, which is provided at lower rates to students because they are a generally healthy segment of the population. And for students on a tight budget, physicians will often work out a payment plan or even a discount.

"Physicians themselves were students for a great part of their lives," Maier says. "They understand students' situations — that budgets are tight. And if they aren't understanding, you can seek another place. Eventually you're going to find a physician who's going to make things work for you."

Until student health centers come completely under the authority of state regulations, steps such as these are the best — and sometimes the only — way for students to make sure they are receiving quality health care.

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