

Hospital — Sungcarwik, Sungca'iwik, Qenawik

TUUGTARAQ SUNGARWIGMEN AG'UQ. – THE DOCTOR IS GOING TO THE HOSPITAL.



Photo: Griffin Memorial Hospital, 1940s. Courtesy of the Anderson Family, Afognak

Medical care in Alutiiq communities was once provided by two types of specialists: healers who treated the sick with heat, herbal medicine, and bloodletting, and shamans who realign the ill with the spirit world.

When new diseases arrived in Alaska with Russian traders, medical care expanded to include Western practices. In the early decades of colonization, sailing ships carried a physician who treated sick sailors and sometimes cared for the ailing in communities they visited.

In the early 1800s, the Russian American Company established a medical system to aid in recruiting Russian workers and promote productivity. The first formal hospital was built in Sitka in about 1818. Here the sick received medical care from a physician, food, and rest at no cost. This hospital acted as the central regional facility, providing equipment, drugs, vaccinations, supplies, and even visiting physicians to outlying areas where the company established infirmaries or

smaller hospitals.

Historic accounts suggest that the company built a hospital in Kodiak in 1840, although a physician was not present. Instead, *feldsher*, local people trained as medical providers, oversaw treatment. As such, Native people were among the leading staff members at the early hospitals. The Alutiiq word *sungcarwik*, a recently coined term for hospital, literally means “place to heal.” Alternatively, you can use, *qenawik*, an older term for hospital that means “place for sickness.”

Who received care at Alaska’s first hospitals? The company offered smallpox vaccinations and treatment for syphilis widely but reserved other services for its employees. Some of these employees were Native people, although many Natives continued to receive medical care in their communities.