The Commonwealth Fund  
Harkness House  
1 East 75th Street  
New York, New York 10021  

Sir:  

I am presently a sophomore enrolled at Alderson-Broaddus College in West Virginia. My major is in the para-medical field; the Physician's Assistant program. My major concern in contacting the Commonwealth organization is to play the "devil's" advocate. Certain discrepancies and gross misunderstandings arose here which justify these comments. In the following paragraphs, I hope to enlighten the organization of these manifestations which are threatening the concept of a Physician's Assistant.  

In May of 1968, the Admissions Dept. of Alderson-Broaddus College called my high school in Trafford, Pennsylvania and informed my Guidance counselor that the college was offering scholarships to interested students who would enroll in A-B in the new four year degree para-medical program. The first reports to me concerning the scholarship were simply unbelievable. Supposedly the Commonwealth Foundation under government supervision, authorized Alderson-Broaddus College to present four year full scholarships to students picked at random from high schools in the East and Appalachian areas. Now, to a middle class senior in high school this was simply a fantastic offer. One would certainly be a fool to turn down an offer like this. Although already accepted at Xavier University as an Economics major; but to alleviate the financial burden placed on my parents, I decided to examine the course at A-B.  

Here is where the first problem manifests itself. Mr. William Leach—now Dean of Men at A-B—from the Admissions dept. traveled 120 miles from Philipp, West Virginia to my high school. My father and my high school guidance counselor were present at the meeting. There I learned the scholarship was not $8,000 for four years, but $4,000 for a period of four years. This offer was still enticing. At that time I
receiving verbal confirmation to my question concerning the availability of med. school or a biology degree if I grew dissatisfied with the program. Mr. Leach informed me personally, my father, and my guidance counselor that although this course would not lead directly to a pre-medical or biology degree, with the addition of possibly three to five courses I might go on to medical school.

This was not an impression I forced from our meeting but rather a declarative statement made to the three people present. With such assurance I felt safe even if I enrolled at A-B and found the program too difficult or not acceptable. I expressed apprehension to Mr. Leach about my ability to succeed in such a seemingly scientifically oriented program, but he assured me he felt I was capable of doing at least satisfactory work.

After some time at A-B, during our first term, I put this same question to Dr. Hu Myers—Instructor of the program at A-B—and he personally wrote on the board four, just four courses he believed we would need to study, Chemistry I and II and two Zoology courses. I, and my classmates, remember it distinctly. Then I believed this was a worthwhile program, not simple a stepping stone to medical school. However, one may conclude from this statement that med school was not a remote possibility. Our courses were challenging in our first year:

- Human Anatomy and Physiology I & II
- Historical, Philosophical, & Ethics of Medicine
- Human Growth and Development
- Introduction to Organic Chemistry
- English Literature
- Microbiology
- Physical Science II
- Symbols of Math
- American Literature

But a disquieting fact was that three of our courses were with nursing students also. When I came back this year I did not realize the implications of classes with nursing students.

Sir, examine the photostatic copy made from the nursing section of the college handbook. Note the circled numbers 20 and 21 in blue. Now on the four year curriculum sheet, in the fall term box during the Soph year, note the two courses titled Med Sci 20 & 21. Although supposedly different courses they are actually the same. We have these classes at the same time, with same teachers as do the nurses. The titles are merely different. On our records in the registrar's office the course descriptions are the same, Introduction to Health, Maintenance & Nutrition and Introduction to Pharmacology. Look further ahead in the program and see the similarities between the nursing courses and the P.A. courses.

Here lies a problem which could deal a "death blow" to the entire concept of the physician's assistant. Our class is reminded time and time again, "You are not going to be nurses." But we take exactly the same courses as nurses. Looking ahead and comparing our four years curriculum plan with the page taken from our college handbook describing the nursing program, outside of electives only two Med Sci classes (Med Sci 10&55) are tailor made for P.A.'s. Every other alleged Med Sci course is in fact a nursing course. It is now clearly
evident that the curriculum committee did not prepare a novel course especially tailored to the Physician Assistant field. They adhered strictly to the nursing program. They did not create a P.A. program but rather a glorified nursing program. Sadly, our labs are not as extensive as the nurses. A-E is training a group of people to enter the medical field who will be incompetent.

Sir, I realize your organization funded the entire program here at A-E. I am making no accusations or allegations of misappropriation of funds or such. I believe however the situation is now critical and warrants your attention. Although this is my personal story, tragically, it has repeated all too often. Students have deliberately been told one-half truths and misled. The college is not planning to change either. I spoke with the Academic Dean here, Dr. Walter Johnson; he told me in no uncertain terms this is how they planned the program.

(Students are dissatisfied and thoroughly disgusted. Many are planning to leave or change their major. The freshmen, unknowing, are being led in the same manner and will receive a rude awakening in their Sophomore year.) The time for action is clear, immediately! I offer no quick-remedy or superbly organized plan which might solve the situation. All I ask Sir is please come down and see for yourself. Talk to different people here and get a true spectrum of opinion. I hope to hear from you as soon as possible. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Charles J. Monohan