



RIGHTS AND WRONGS



Growing out of the Medical Committee for Civil Rights which organized the medical contingent of the March on Washington in 1963, the Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR) was created by a group of doctors led by American physician Robert Smith in 1964.

MCHR members, doctors, nurses, psychologists, and other health professionals — Black and White — lent solidarity to the civil rights movement in the US by providing medical support and aid for civil rights workers at marches and demonstrations, and raising public awareness of issues of discrimination and segregation within health care systems in Mississippi.



MCHR provided a medical presence in Black communities, some of which had never seen a doctor.

They established and staffed health information and pre-natal programs in many Black communities. Appalled at the separate and unequal care provided to Blacks by Mississippi's segregated system, they soon involved themselves in political struggles to open and improve Mississippi's health care system for all.



In 1964, MCHR set up a small desegregated public health clinic in Mileston in Holmes County, Mississippi. The clinic pioneered a community-oriented primary care program that involved local people in the decision-making process. Not only did the clinic provide essential medical care, but it also helped the local Black community organize around health care issues. Local people formed the Holmes County Health Association as a forum to discuss the deficiencies in the county's health care system.

The increased awareness of health care inequality in the state led to substantial improvements in medical access for the Black population. Studies conducted decades later concerning the state of health care in Mississippi in the 1960s and '70s revealed the significance of the MCHR's work. One of the most notable improvements was a dramatic reduction in the infant mortality rate among the Black population, which decreased by 65% between 1965 and 1971.