

THE CHALLENGE OF LEADERSHIP IN AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE SOCIETY*

By

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I WISH TO THANK PRESIDENT KAREN HOLBROOKE FOR THE INVITATION TO ADDRESS YOU TODAY AND TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS COMMENCEMENT PROGRAM. YOU ARE OUR LEADERS OF TOMORROW. IT IS A GREAT PLEASURE AND HONOR FOR ME TO HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE WITH YOU SOME OF MY PERSPECTIVES ON THE HEALTH OF OUR NATION AND OUR SOCIETY, AND TO REFLECT ON THE ISSUE OF LEADERSHIP FOR AN INCREASINGLY DIVERSE SOCIETY IN THE 21ST CENTURY. YOU WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THAT LEADERSHIP. YOU WILL CONTRIBUTE TO THAT DIVERSITY.

INDIVIDUALLY AND AS A COMMUNITY, THE DECISIONS YOU MAKE WILL SHAPE YOUR LIVES, EXPAND (OR LIMIT) YOUR FREEDOMS, AND INFLUENCE THE LIVES OF OTHERS. EACH OF OUR LIVES IS A TOTALITY OF OUR DECISIONS AND, WORKING TOGETHER, A COMMUNITY, A STATE OR A NATION CAN CREATE A CULTURE OF POSITIVE VALUES AND HEALTHY BEHAVIORS. WITH VISION AND COMMITMENT, WE CAN CONTINUE TO IMPROVE THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL HEALTH OF OUR CITIZENS, AND OUR COMMUNITIES.

CULTURE OF CHARACTER

FAR-REACHING AND CREDIBLE EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROGRAMS ARE THE FIRST STEP TOWARD POSITIVELY-TRANSFORMING OUR COMMUNITIES. OUR CULTURE MUST REINFORCE THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE AND THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF FREE CHOICE. AS SECRETARY OF HHS, I OFTEN SPOKE OF THE NEED FOR A CULTURE OF CHARACTER A CULTURE THAT WORKS FOR A STRONGER SENSE OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND COMMUNITY SERVICE. EACH OF US HAS A GIVEN SET OF POSSIBILITIES, DIFFERENT ACTIONS WE CAN UNDERTAKE, OPPORTUNITIES WE CAN USE, AND VARIOUS ROADS THAT WE CAN TRAVEL.

I CHALLENGE YOU TO CREATE A CULTURE WHERE YOUR INDIVIDUAL STAMP, THE WAY THAT YOU SHAPE YOUR LIVES, THE ENGRAVING OF YOUR ACTIONS, WILL REFLECT A HIGH LEVEL OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND OF SERVICE TO OTHERS. I STRESS PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY BECAUSE WE MUST HIGHLIGHT THE FREEDOM OF CHOICE, THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE DECISIONS IN SHAPING OUR OWN LIVES. IN ADDITION, I STRESS COMMUNITY SERVICE TO UNDERLINE THE CENTRAL TRUTH THAT WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, A CULTURE OF CHARACTER EMPOWERS OUR CITIZENS. IT UNDERLINES THE BASIC NOTION THAT EACH PERSON IS IMPORTANT.

THIS IS HOW WE BUILD A CULTURE OF CHARACTER. THIS IS A CARING AND COMPASSIONATE CULTURE AT WORK. WITH EACH POSITIVE ACTION WE TAKE, AND WITH THE SERVICE WE GIVE TO OTHERS, WE MAKE A POWERFUL IMPACT ON OUR OWN HEALTH STATUS IN THE COMMUNITY AND THE STATUS OF OTHERS. YOU CAN BECOME THE VANGUARD OF CHANGE. YOU CAN SET

THE AGENDA. YOU CAN CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT OFFERS ESTEEM, REGARD, AND HOPE FOR EACH PERSON.

THE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES OF HEALTH DISPARITIES IN OUR SOCIETY IMPACT ALL AMERICANS, DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY. WITH THE SPECTACULAR ADVANCES IN OUR KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN BIOLOGY AND ADVANCES IN BIOTECHNOLOGY OVER THE PAST SEVERAL DECADES, OUR CONTINUING GOAL SHOULD BE TO EXTEND THE LIFE SPAN OF OUR NATION'S CITIZENS, INCLUDING MINORITIES AND THE POOR, AS WELL AS TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ALL OUR CITIZENS.

AS A RESULT OF OUR NATION'S INVESTMENTS IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH:

1. NUMBER OF NOBEL PRIZES IN PHYSIOLOGY AND MEDICINE AWARDED TO AMERICAN SCIENTISTS HAS BEEN ALMOST HALF OF SUCH AWARDS IN THE CENTURY, ALTHOUGH THE U.S. HAS ONLY SIX PERCENT OF THE WORLD'S POPULATION.

2. HALF OF ALL NEW BLOCKBUSTER PHARMACEUTICALS HAVE COME FROM U.S. PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES.
3. WE HAVE THE MOST HIGHLY TRAINED HEALTH PERSONNEL -- THE BEST HEALTH PROFESSIONS EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM.
4. OUR TECHNOLOGY IS THE MOST ADVANCED, WITH A PLETHORA OF MEDICAL DEVICES, CLINICAL TREATMENT PROTOCOLS, DIAGNOSTIC PROCEDURES.
5. WE INVEST MORE DOLLARS IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH (CURRENTLY, \$23.0 BILLION BY NIH; \$28.0 BILLION MORE INVESTED IN CLINICAL AND APPLIED RESEARCH BY INDUSTRY), WITH THE RESULT THAT VIRTUALLY EVERY WEEK WE READ ABOUT SOME NEW BIOLOGICAL SYSTEM WHICH HAS BEEN DECIPHERED C THE GENETIC CODE, THE DISCOVERY AND USE OF STEM CELLS, GROWING NERVE CELLS IN THE LABORATORY, ETC.

BUT, OUR CHALLENGING PROBLEM IS THE FACT THAT THESE BENEFITS FROM OUR INVESTMENTS IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH DO NOT REACH ALL OF OUR CITIZENS EQUITABLY. THE POOR AND THE NATION'S MINORITIES HAVE BEEN LEFT BEHIND. ALTHOUGH THE HEALTH OF ALL AMERICAN GROUPS IMPROVED DURING THE TWENTIETH CENTURY, THE HEALTH OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS, HISPANIC AMERICANS, NATIVE AMERICANS AND NATIVE HAWAIIANS DID NOT IMPROVE AS MUCH AS WHITES. THUS, THE GAP IN HEALTH STATUS BETWEEN MAJORITY AND MINORITIES, BETWEEN RICH AND POOR IN THE UNITED STATES HAS WIDENED OVER THE LAST THIRTY YEARS.

THE PAST ONE-HUNDRED YEARS SAW REMARKABLE ADVANCES FROM PUBLIC HEALTH, BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH, AND MEDICAL CARE. THE PAST FIFTY YEARS HAVE SEEN MANY RETURNS ON OUR NATION'S INVESTMENT IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH, PRIMARILY THROUGH THE LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH.

THE NEW YEAR, THE NEW DECADE, AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM BRING WITH THEM A NEW CHALLENGE, THE CHALLENGE OF THE CONTINUING, AND WIDENING, DISPARITIES IN HEALTH STATUS BETWEEN WHITE AMERICANS

AND THE NATION'S MINORITY POPULATIONS. WITH THE INCREASINGLY POWERFUL TOOLS AVAILABLE FROM BIOMEDICAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESEARCH, THE DEVELOPMENT OF TECHNOLOGY OUR GREATER UNDERSTANDING OF THE INTERPLAY OF BIOLOGY, BEHAVIOR, PSYCHOLOGY, CULTURE AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS ON HEALTH STATUS AND HEALTH OUTCOMES, WE SHOULD SEIZE THIS MOMENT AND RESPOND POSITIVELY TO THE CHALLENGE. THE PROMISE TO BE REALIZED FROM THIS EFFORT IS A HEALTHIER SOCIETY – PHYSICALLY, SOCIALLY, ECONOMICALLY – A STRONGER SET OF SHARED VALUES. .

I LOOK FORWARD TO THE TIME WHEN DISPARITIES IN OUR NATION WILL BE SPOKEN OF ONLY IN THE PAST TENSE, AN HISTORICAL PHENOMENON OF A BYGONE ERA. BUT, WE HAVE MANY MILES TO GO BEFORE WE REACH THAT HAPPY STATUS. WITH YOUR GENERATION'S LEADERSHIP I AM SURE WE WILL GET THERE. THE ONLY QUESTION IS, HOW SOON? MY OPTIMISTIC RESPONSE IS, SOONER RATHER THAN LATER, MUCH SOONER THAN OTHERS MIGHT THINK.

WHEN THAT HAPPENS, ALL OF US WILL HAVE MUCH CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION OF THE NEW EQUALITY AND STRONGER SHARED VALUES WE WILL HAVE ACHIEVED IN OUR SOCIETY BECAUSE OF YOU AND YOUR ACTIONS.

THANK YOU.

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