

ORIGINAL

REMARKS

BY

C. EVERETT KOOP, M.D., SC.D.

SURGEON GENERAL

OF THE

U. S. PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

PRESENTED TO THE WEST JERSEY HEALTH SYSTEM

CHERRY HILL, NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 17, 1987

WITH SO MUCH ATTENTION FOCUSED ON THE WORLD PANDEMIC OF AIDS THESE DAYS -- AND IT CERTAINLY DESERVES OUR ATTENTION -- WE NEVERTHELESS TEND TO LOSE SIGHT OF THE MANY OTHER MAJOR HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THE WORLD...PROBLEMS WHICH, AT THE PRESENT TIME AT LEAST...CLAIM MANY MORE LIVES AND EXHAUST MANY MORE OF THE FISCAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES OF MOST COUNTRIES THAN AIDS DOES.

BUT LET'S STICK TO AIDS. AND LET ME START WITH THE GLOBAL PICTURE.

AS OF AUGUST, THE REPORTED AIDS CASE-LOAD IN COUNTRIES OTHER THAN THE UNITED STATES HAD REACHED 14,600. IT'S FAIR TO SAY THAT THIS FIGURE IS WELL BELOW WHAT THE TRUE FIGURE MIGHT BE, SINCE AIDS IS VERY UNDER-REPORTED. FOR INSTANCE, ABOUT 17 COUNTRIES IN AFRICA REPORT EITHER 1 CASE OR NO CASES AT ALL, WHILE OTHER COUNTRIES -- SOME SHARING COMMON BORDERS -- REPORT 300...700...AND 1,100 CASES OF AIDS.

W.H.O. SAYS, HOWEVER, THAT THE NUMBERS ARE CLIMBING STEEPLY AND THAT, OVER THE NEXT 5 YEARS, THE WORLD COULD ADD ANYWHERE FROM ANOTHER HALF-MILLION TO ANOTHER 3 MILLION NEW CASES OF AIDS.

I SHOULD ADD THAT THIS IS ONE MAJOR REASON WHY THE PRESIDENT HAS ASKED THE CONGRESS TO APPROPRIATE THE FULL U.S. CONTRIBUTION TO THE UNITED NATIONS, AND ESPECIALLY TO THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION.

DISEASE KNOWS NOT BORDERS. IN FACT, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE DISEASE OF AIDS ITSELF MAY HAVE COME TO THESE SHORES FROM AFRICA BY WAY OF THE CARIBBEAN.

WHETHER THAT'S THE WAY IT HAPPENED OR NOT, WE WILL NEVER FULLY CONTAIN THIS DISEASE HERE IN THE UNITED STATES, AS LONG AS IT IS NOT ALSO CONTAINED ELSEWHERE IN THE WORLD. AND THAT TAKES MONEY.

IT WILL BE TERRIBLY SELF-DEFEATING, IF THE UNITED STATES DOES NOT PAY ITS FULL ASSESSMENT TO THE UNITED NATIONS AND THUS, WILL NOT ENABLE THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION TO BE AN EFFECTIVE WORLD LEADER IN THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS.

WE MUST STAND TOGETHER IN THE FIGHT AGAINST AIDS WITH ALL OUR NEIGHBORS ON THIS TINY PLANET. AIDS IS CERTAINLY A PERSONAL TRAGEDY FOR EVERYONE WHO IS INFECTED. BUT IT'S ALSO A TRAGEDY FOR HUMANITY ITSELF.

I BELIEVE THAT THE UNITED STATES MUST BE A FULL PARTNER WITH ALL OTHER COUNTRIES, IN THIS FIGHT AGAINST AIDS. THAT'S A MORAL CHOICE THAT WE MUST MAKE. IT MUST NOT BE DECIDED BY EITHER POLITICS OR ECONOMICS.

AS OF NOW -- SINCE WE FIRST ENCOUNTERED AIDS IN JUNE 1981 -- 43,000 HAVE BEEN DIAGNOSED, 26,000 HAVE DIED, AND THE REST WILL PROBABLY DIE.

BY 1991, WE ESTIMATE THAT 270,000 WILL BE DIAGNOSED, 170,000 WILL BE DEAD, AND 54,000 WILL DIE IN THAT YEAR.

BETWEEN 1 AND 1.5 MILLION ARE HIV POSITIVE, THEY MAY NOT KNOW THAT THEY ARE HIV POSITIVE, THEY ARE INFECTIOUS TO OTHERS THROUGH SEX AND OR NEEDLE-SHARING AMONG I.V. DRUG ABUSERS.

AIDS IS A DEVASTATING DISEASE, BUT LET'S PUT IT IN THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE.

I SAID 26,000 PEOPLE HAVE DIED FROM AIDS IN 6 YEARS, 5 MONTHS.

THAT SAME NUMBER WILL DIE EVERY 28 DAYS FROM SMOKING.

OR, WHILE 26,000 HAVE DIED FROM AIDS -- OVER 2,200,000 HAVE DIED FROM SMOKING.

WITH THE NUMBER OF AIDS CASES DOUBLING IN A LITTLE MORE THAN A YEAR, IT WON'T TAKE AIDS LONG TO CATCH UP.

I'D LIKE TO LOOK AT THIS PANDEMIC OF AIDS FROM A LITTLE DIFFERENT POINT OF VIEW. I WANT TO TALK ABOUT WHAT IT'S DOING TO SOME OF OUR PEOPLE...WHAT IT CAN DO TO ALL OF OUR PEOPLE...AND WHAT WE MUST DO TO HELP PEOPLE CONQUER AIDS, THE MOST VICIOUS OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES IN THE HISTORY OF THE HUMAN RACE.

LET ME CONFESS THAT, IN THE BATTLE AGAINST THIS DISEASE, MEDICINE AND SCIENCE ARE MAKING VERY SMALL HEADWAY, RELATIVE TO WHAT HAS YET TO BE ACCOMPLISHED.

IN FACT, I'LL GO EVEN FURTHER AND SAY THAT THE FINAL VICTORY OVER THIS DISEASE WILL NOT FOLLOW THE PATTERNS OF OTHER SUCH VICTORIES -- THE ONE OVER SMALLPOX, FOR EXAMPLE, OR POLIO.

NO, THIS TIME, THE VICTORY WILL PROBABLY NOT BE THE EXCLUSIVE VICTORY OF SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND CLINICAL PRACTICE.

THE FINAL VICTORY OVER THE DISEASE OF AIDS WILL MUCH MORE LIKELY SPRING FROM THE IMPELLING FORCE OF COMPASSIONATELY COMMITTED, ETHICALLY MOTIVATED, AND COURAGEOUS MEN AND WOMEN WITH LITTLE OR NO MEDICAL BACKGROUND AT ALL.

LET ME TAKE A LITTLE TIME TO EXPLAIN THAT OBSERVATION.

EVERYTHING THE PUBLIC THINKS AND DOES ABOUT AIDS SEEMS TO BE RELATED TO THE THREE BASIC ASPECTS OF THE DISEASE:

FIRST OF ALL, IN SPITE OF ALL WE'VE LEARNED ABOUT THIS VIRUS IN THE PAST 6 YEARS, AIDS IS STILL PRETTY MUCH OF A MYSTERY, ESPECIALLY TO THE PUBLIC. WE KNOW HOW IT'S TRANSMITTED, FOR EXAMPLE. AND WE ALSO KNOW HOW IT ATTACKS AND DESTROYS THE HUMAN IMMUNE SYSTEM. BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHY IT DOES THAT AND WE STILL CAN'T PREDICT WHEN THE AIDS VIRUS WILL -- OR WILL NOT -- PROCEED ON ITS DESTRUCTIVE PATH. SO, FIRST ON OUR LIST IS MYSTERY.

BUT MEDICAL SCIENCE DOES NOT THRIVE ON MYSTERY...IT THRIVES ON DISCOVERY. AND DISCOVERY STILL SEEMS TO BE SOME DISTANCE AWAY FROM US.

AIDS IS A MYSTERY...BUT IT'S NOT ONLY A MYSTERY. IT'S AN ENORMOUS HUMAN CATASTROPHE.

MANY PEOPLE DENY THAT THEY ARE NOW -- OR COULD EVER BE -- INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS, EVEN THOUGH THEY MAY ENGAGE IN HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR...ANAL INTERCOURSE, FOR EXAMPLE, OR NEEDLE-SHARING AMONG I.V. DRUG ABUSERS.

BUT MORE IMPORTANT, MANY PEOPLE WHO DO NOT ENGAGE IN ANY HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR AT ALL AND WILL PROBABLY NEVER CATCH AIDS, ARE READY TO GIVE UP ON PEOPLE WHO DO HAVE AIDS.

BUT THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE CANNOT DO...WE CANNOT GIVE UP ON PEOPLE...WE HAVE NO MORAL RIGHT TO ABANDON ANOTHER PERSON.

AND THAT'S THE THREAT FROM THIS ASPECT OF AIDS...THE THREAT RAISED BY ITS MYSTERY. BECAUSE, IF WE RETREAT FROM THIS MYSTERY, THEN WE WILL BE RETREATING FROM MAN HIMSELF...

WE WILL ACCEPT THE CONTINUING CATASTROPHE OF LOSS OF HUMAN LIFE...

WE WILL DENY THAT MANKIND IS SUPERIOR TO THIS DISEASE...

BUT IN THIS TERRIBLE AND FEARSOME PERIOD, I MAINTAIN -- AS A PHYSICIAN, AS A SCIENTIST, BUT ALSO AS A HUMAN BEING -- THAT MAN CANNOT BE DENIED.

AIDS -- BY ITSELF -- WOULD MAKE US DO THAT.

PEOPLE WHO LIVE IN TOTAL FEAR OF AIDS WOULD HAVE US DO THAT.

AND SOME PEOPLE WEAKENED BY THE DESPAIR OF AIDS, SEEING PATIENTS DIE OF IT, WOULD HAVE US DO THAT.

BUT WE CANNOT.

AND THAT'S WHY WE MUST RECOGNIZE THIS ASPECT OF MYSTERY FOR WHAT IT IS...AND OVERCOME IT.

THE SECOND FACT ABOUT AIDS THAT COLORS ALL WE SAY AND DO IS THAT THE DISEASE IS VIRTUALLY 100 PERCENT FATAL.

I MENTIONED A MOMENT AGO THAT THE DISEASE HAS ATTACKED MORE THAN 44,000 PEOPLE SINCE JUNE OF 1981 AND THAT ALMOST 26,000 OF THOSE PEOPLE HAVE ALREADY DIED.

THAT'S THE TRUTH...BUT THERE'S MORE. THE TRUTH ALSO INCLUDES THE FACT THAT, OF THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAD AIDS IN 1981, AT LEAST 91 PERCENT OF THEM HAVE ALREADY DIED.

OF THOSE WHO HAD THE DISEASE IN 1982, SOME 87 PERCENT HAVE ALREADY DIED.

OF THOSE IN 1983, 89 PERCENT OF THEM HAVE ALREADY DIED OF AIDS.

AND SO ON.

AIDS IS THE CLOSEST THING IN OUR ENVIRONMENT TODAY TO BEING A "VIRTUALLY 100 PERCENT FATAL DISEASE".

WE HAVE ONLY A FEW DRUGS COMING INTO THE MARKETPLACE -- A.Z.T. MOST PROMINENT AMONG THEM -- AND THESE DRUGS HELP PROLONG LIFE A LITTLE BIT...A FEW MONTHS...MAYBE A YEAR OR SO.

BUT WE HAVE NOTHING AT ALL...NOTHING... THAT WILL SAFELY AND EFFECTIVELY STOP THE DISEASE OF AIDS IN ITS TRACKS.

WE HAVE NO DRUGS...NO VACCINES...NO MAGIC BULLETS...NOTHING THAT CAN ACCOMPLISH THAT LIFE-SAVING JOB.

WHAT DO WE HAVE? ONLY EDUCATION.

NOW, SOME PEOPLE CALL IT "EDUCATION." OTHERS CALL IT "PUBLIC INFORMATION." AND STILL OTHERS CALL IT A "CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING."

ALL THOSE TERMS WILL DO. BECAUSE THEY ARE ALL ESSENTIALLY THE SAME THING.

IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE TELL THE PUBLIC, WHOSE SYMPATHY AND COOPERATION ARE SORELY NEEDED, THAT -- AT THE MOMENT -- DEATH IS THE PARTNER OF PEOPLE WITH AIDS.

IT'S A GREAT MISTAKE TO UNDERESTIMATE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS SECOND ASPECT OF AIDS -- ITS VIRTUALLY 100 PERCENT MORTALITY RATE -- BECAUSE THIS FACT IS ALREADY RAISING THE POSSIBILITY OF ABANDONMENT IN THE MINDS OF OTHERWISE RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE.

I'VE BEEN HEARING STORIES OF SOME PHYSICIANS AND NURSES -- VERY FEW, THANK GOODNESS, BUT EVEN ONE IS ONE TOO MANY -- PHYSICIANS AND NURSES WHO DON'T WANT TO TREAT AIDS PATIENTS BECAUSE OF THE DANGER OF BECOMING INFECTED WITH THE VIRUS THEMSELVES.

YOU KNOW...I KNOW...AND THEY KNOW THAT SUCH A DANGER IS MINUSCULE...AT THE VERY MOST.

YET WE ALL WATCHED THE TELEVISION NEWS COVERAGE OF THE TRAGEDY OF THE RAY FAMILY IN ARCADIA, FLORIDA...REJECTED AND EXPELLED NOT ONLY BY PLAIN TOWNSPEOPLE BUT ALSO BY EDUCATORS AND COMMUNITY LEADERS.

I THINK THEY MAY BE TRYING TO TELL US SOMETHING ELSE...SOMETHING SO CONTRARY TO WESTERN ETHICAL TRADITIONS THAT THEY SIMPLY CANNOT BRING THEMSELVES TO SAY IT STRAIGHT OUT. BUT I THINK THEY MIGHT BE TRYING TO SAY WHAT SOME HAVE ALREADY SAID TO ME...

"WE DON'T CARE, BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE WITH AIDS ARE AS GOOD AS DEAD ANYWAY".

THAT'S A HORRIBLE STATEMENT, AND THE FIRST MOMENT IT IS SAID IT MUST STIMULATE US TO EXTEND EVEN FURTHER OUR CALL FOR COMPASSION FOR PEOPLE WITH AIDS.

THERE IS A MESSAGE THAT EACH OF US MUST DELIVER TO THE WORLD EVERY DAY. THE INEVITABILITY OF DEATH FROM THE DISEASE OF AIDS SHOULD NOT -- BY ITSELF -- CAUSE THE VICTIMS OF AIDS TO BE ABANDONED AND, IN THE WORDS OF THE PHILOSOPHER MARTIN BUBER, GIVEN THE "FORETASTE OF DEATH".

WE HAVE NO REASON TO LET THAT HAPPEN.

SO THERE IS THE MYSTERY OF AIDS.

AND THERE IS THE CERTAINTY OF DEATH FROM AIDS.

AND FINALLY, THERE IS THE THIRD ASPECT OF THE DISEASE OF AIDS THAT IS POSED TO ME IN JUST ABOUT EVERY QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD WHEREVER I SPEAK. AND IT'S THAT PEOPLE GET AIDS BECAUSE THEY DO THINGS MOST OTHER PEOPLE DON'T DO AND DON'T APPROVE OF DOING.

BUT THIS THIRD ASPECT OF THE ISSUE OF AIDS IS EVEN MORE COMPLICATED THAN IT SEEMS.

IN ADDITION TO THE 28,000 HOMOSEXUALS AND BISEXUAL MALES WHO HAVE HAD AIDS, WE MUST ADD THE 10,000 DRUG ADDICTS WHO HAVE SHARED DIRTY NEEDLES AND OTHER PARAPHERNALIA AND, BY SUCH ACTIONS, SPREAD THE DISEASE OF AIDS EVEN FURTHER.

THE VAST MAJORITY OF AMERICANS DON'T "SHOOT" DRUGS, BELIEVE ME. NOR DO THEY APPROVE OF PEOPLE WHO DO.

IN ADDITION, OF THOSE DRUG ADDICTS WITH AIDS, THERE ARE 4 BLACKS AND LATINOS FOR EACH WHITE PERSON. SO THERE IS YET ANOTHER ELEMENT OF SOCIAL RANCOR AND DIVISION THAT FILLS OUT THIS THIRD ASPECT OF AIDS.

IN OTHER WORDS, 90 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE DISEASE OF AIDS CONTRACTED IT WHILE THEY WERE ENGAGING IN HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR, OF WHICH THE MAJORITY OF THE PUBLIC DISAPPROVE.

NOW THAT THEY HAVE THE DISEASE, IT IS A VIRTUAL CERTAINTY THAT THEY WILL DIE.

AND THE REST OF US WILL BE WITNESS TO THEIR DEATHS, YET WE WILL HAVE NOTHING AT HAND TO PREVENT THOSE DEATHS.

SOME DAY, WE MAY WELL HAVE A BIOMEDICAL CURE FOR AIDS...A VACCINE THAT IS BOTH SAFE AND EFFECTIVE AND GENERALLY AVAILABLE.

BUT WHO SHOULD BE THE FIRST PEOPLE TO GET IT? MY GUESS WOULD BE THOSE VERY SAME PEOPLE WHO PRACTICE HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR.

WILL THE AMERICAN PEOPLE BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THAT? I HOPE SO...BUT I'M NOT REALLY SURE THEY'RE READY YET.

HOW TRAGIC FOR THEM.

AND HOW TRAGIC FOR AMERICA.

THE UNITED STATES IS ONLY NOW EMERGING FROM TWO DECADES OF TURMOIL, DURING WHICH WE HAVE TRIED TO CORRECT THE SOCIAL INJUSTICES OF THE PAST. WE HAVE FINALLY EXTENDED TO ALL AMERICANS -- REGARDLESS OF RACE, COLOR, CREED, ETHNIC ORIGIN, RELIGION, AGE, OR SEX -- THE BIRTHRIGHT OF FREEDOM THAT IS THEIRS.

WILL THE DISEASE OF AIDS -- ALL BY ITSELF -- REVERSE THIS TREND IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY? WE HOPE AND PRAY THAT IT WILL NOT.

BUT HOPES AND PRAYERS MAY NOT BE ENOUGH. WE WILL NEED COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP AT ALL LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND THROUGHOUT OUR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS TO REINFORCE THOSE HOPES AND PRAYERS.

IT'S APPROPRIATE TO ASK THAT QUESTION OF OUR GOVERNMENT. BUT WE CANNOT STOP THERE. WE NEED TO MAKE SURE THAT EVERY AMERICAN UNDERSTANDS JUST WHAT IS AT STAKE HERE AND THAT HE OR SHE WILL DO WHATEVER IS NECESSARY TO MAKE SURE THAT OUR COUNTRY NEVER RETURNS IN FEAR AND HATRED TO THE WAYS OF A SHAMEFUL PAST.

AS THE PRESIDENT HAS SAID, WE MUST COME TOGETHER AND FIGHT THIS DISEASE WITH EVERYTHING AT OUR COMMAND. BUT WE MUST NOT BE THE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE IT.

BUT ARE WE TRULY MATURE ENOUGH A SOCIETY TO REMAIN COLOR-
BLIND IN THIS WAR AGAINST AIDS? HOW DO WE KNOW?

THESE AND OTHER ISSUES LIE ON THE HORIZON BEFORE US. BUT
THE HORIZON IS NOT THAT FAR AWAY.

I HOPE WE WILL NOT STUMBLE ACROSS THAT TERRAIN, UNPREPARED
FOR THE CHALLENGES THAT LIE BEYOND. I HOPE WE WILL BEGIN TO TALK
ABOUT THESE ISSUES AS THE WISE, 200-YEAR-OLD SOCIETY WE PROFESS
TO BE.

IF WE DO, WE MAY GIVE THE WORLD SOMETHING EVERY BIT AS
PRECIOUS AS THE MUCH-DESIRED AIDS VACCINE: WE WILL SHOW THE
WORLD HOW COMPASSION AND JUSTICE...NOT SCIENCE ALONE...CAN
TRIUMPH OVER DISEASE.

ONCE AGAIN...THANK YOU.