

ORIGINAL

ADDRESS

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



PRESENTED TO "FRONTLINE" CONFERENCE
FOR HEALTHCARE WORKERS AND POLICY-MAKERS

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(GREETINGS TO HOSTS, GUESTS, FRIENDS, ETC.)

I WANT TO THANK THE SPONSORING AGENCIES AND THE PROGRAM COMMITTEE FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK TO YOU THIS EVENING.

THIS IS AN UNUSUAL MEETING, IN THAT IT BRINGS TOGETHER SO MANY ORGANIZATIONS WITH REAL CONCERNS ABOUT OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH IN GENERAL AND ABOUT AIDS IN PARTICULAR. YET, FOR MOST OF THE YEAR, YOUR ORGANIZATIONS RARELY HAVE A REASON OR A CHANCE TO TALK WITH ONE ANOTHER.

THIS WEEK, YOU HAVE A REASON AND YOU HAVE A CHANCE. AND I HOPE YOU WILL TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF THIS MEETING TO DO SO. I HOPE YOU WILL TALK WITH ONE ANOTHER ... TEACH ONE ANOTHER ... AND LEARN FROM ONE ANOTHER.

I KNOW IT WON'T BE EASY. THE SUBJECT -- AIDS AND HEALTH CARE WORKERS -- IS A TOUGH ONE. ALSO, THIS IS A DIFFICULT PERIOD FOR MOST OF US ... A PERIOD OF UNCERTAINTY ABOUT THE FUTURE.

WE HAVE OUR AGENDAS FOR ACTION ... BUT WE ALSO REALIZE THAT OUR ASPIRATIONS ARE RUNNING FAR AHEAD OF OUR RESOURCES. AND THAT'S DISCOURAGING. AND SO, DESPITE OUR AGENDAS AND OUR PLANS, WE TEND TO FUNCTION AT A LOWER THAN USUAL LEVEL OF ENERGY.

BUT WE DON'T WANT TO DO THAT BECAUSE IT'S JUST NOT NATURAL TO SHRINK BACK FROM A GREAT SOCIAL CHALLENGE. INSTEAD, EACH OF US HAS A NATURAL INSTINCT TO WANT TO DO BETTER AND DO MORE ... TO RECOVER AND KEEP GOING ... TO REVIVE AND RENEW.

THAT, AFTER ALL, IS WHAT PUBLIC SERVICE IS ALL ABOUT, AND I APPLY THAT GENERAL TERM BOTH TO GOVERNMENT SERVICE AND TO ANY SERVICE IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR THAT RESPONDS TO THE HUMAN NEEDS OF OUR PEOPLE.

AND THAT'S THE CONTEXT THAT I WOULD WANT THIS PARTICULAR MEETING TO HAVE. YES, OUR SPECIFIC FOCUS IS ON THE NEEDS OF THE HEALTH WORKFORCE IN REGARD TO THE AIDS EPIDEMIC.

BUT WE SHOULD APPLY THIS SPECIFIC FOCUS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A BETTER, HEALTHIER LIFE FOR OUR WORKFORCE IN GENERAL.

THEREFORE, I'D HAVE TO SAY THAT I'D BE MUCH MORE CONVINCED ABOUT AN EMPLOYER'S CONCERN WITH THE THREAT OF AIDS, IF THAT EMPLOYER IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT EMPLOYEES WHO ARE UNDER STRESS, WHO SMOKE OR TAKE DRUGS, WHO DRINK TOO MUCH, AND WHO ARE OVERWEIGHT.

I'D BE IMPRESSED BY AN EMPLOYER'S CONCERN ABOUT AIDS, IF THAT EMPLOYER ALSO HAD A WORKERS' CAFETERIA THAT SOLD NUTRITIOUS FOOD AT A REASONABLE COST.

AND I'D BE IMPRESSED BY AN EMPLOYER'S SINCERITY CONCERNING THE THREAT OF AIDS, IF HE OR SHE WERE ALSO COMMITTED TO HAVING EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES OPEN TO EVERYONE, REGARDLESS OF RACE OR AGE OR SEX OR NATIONAL OR ETHNIC ORIGIN.

AND I'D BE VERY IMPRESSED IF ALL WORKERS RECEIVED EQUAL PAY FOR EQUAL WORK.

IN OTHER WORDS, THE AIDS EPIDEMIC IS A SERIOUS, DEADLY AFFAIR. AND I WANT OUR HEALTH CARE AND MEDICAL INSTITUTIONS TO TAKE IT VERY SERIOUSLY INDEED AS A THREAT TO THEIR EMPLOYEES.

AND, FRANKLY, ONE MEASURE OF THEIR ABILITY TO BE SERIOUS ABOUT THE THREAT OF AIDS IS SIMPLY THE WAY THOSE INSTITUTIONS RELATE TO THEIR EMPLOYEES IN GENERAL.

AND I THINK THE PARALLEL CONCEPT IS TRUE, ALSO: THAT IS TO SAY THAT I BELIEVE EMPLOYEES WILL TAKE THE THREAT OF AIDS SERIOUSLY AND WILL FOLLOW GUIDELINES FOR SAFETY IF THEY'RE ALSO EMPLOYEES ...

WHO FEEL GOOD ABOUT THE PROFESSION THEY'RE IN ...
WHO ARE ATTENTIVE AND COMPASSIONATE TO EVERY PATIENT WHO
COMES THEIR WAY ...
AND WHO ARE TOTALLY COMMITTED TO SAVING LIVES OR, AT THE
VERY LEAST, WILL PROVIDE A DECENT FINAL CHAPTER TO
THOSE WHOSE LIVES CANNOT BE SAVED.

I'M RAISING THESE POINTS BECAUSE -- AS YOU ALL KNOW, I'M
SURE -- AIDS IS PARTICULARLY FRIGHTENING TO THE AVERAGE PERSON.

* THE DISEASE IS STILL SPREADING ... WE ADDED MORE THAN
32,000 NEW CASES IN JUST THIS PAST YEAR ALONE. THE TOTAL
FOR ALL CASES SINCE JUNE 1981 NOW STANDS AT ABOUT 83,000.

* WE STILL HAVE NO CURE FOR IT ... WE HAVE SOME DRUGS THAT HELP THE AIDS PATIENT IN SOME WAYS -- A.Z.T. IS ONE OF THOSE DRUGS -- BUT WE HAVE NO VACCINE YET AND WE'RE QUITE A WAYS FROM HAVING ONE.

* ALSO, AIDS IS FATAL ... BETWEEN 90 AND 92 PERCENT OF PEOPLE WITH AIDS 5 YEARS AGO AND MORE HAVE SINCE DIED. HALF THE PEOPLE WITH AIDS IN 1987 HAVE ALREADY DIED. AIDS IS CLEARLY ONE OF THE MOST LETHAL OF ANY OF MANKIND'S INFECTIOUS DISEASES.

* AND FINALLY, AIDS IS SPREAD BY PEOPLE WHO ENGAGE IN SPECIFIC HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS INVOLVING SEX AND/OR DRUGS. THIS IS PROBABLY THE MOST TROUBLING ASPECT OF ALL, SINCE THE OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF AMERICANS DO NOT ENGAGE IN ANAL SEX NOR DO THEY "SHOOT" DANGEROUS DRUGS. AND THEY PARTICULARLY DISAPPROVE OF OTHER PEOPLE WHO DO THOSE THINGS.

AND THAT'S WHERE THINGS CAN GET OFF TRACK. SO WE MUST CONSTANTLY MAKE SURE THAT WHAT WE'RE REALLY AGAINST IS A DISEASE ... NOT THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE IT.

BUT PLEASE DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME. I DON'T BELIEVE WE HAVE TO COMPROMISE OUR FEELINGS ABOUT THE KIND OF BEHAVIOR THAT MAKES AIDS POSSIBLE. IN FACT, OUR BASIC WEAPON AGAINST AIDS -- EDUCATION -- IS DIRECTED RIGHT AT THOSE HIGH-RISK PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR AND RIGHT AT THE PEOPLE WHO PRACTICE THOSE BEHAVIORS SO THAT THEY'LL CHANGE.

BUT EDUCATION IS NOT CONDEMNATION ... IT'S NOT HATE ... AND IT'S NOT FEAR.

WE MUST NOT ATTACK WHOLE GROUPS OF PEOPLE BECAUSE SOME AMONG THEM MAY BE PRACTICING HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR. AND WE MUST NOT ATTACK THOSE HIGH-RISK PEOPLE THEMSELVES THROUGH DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES OF ONE KIND OR ANOTHER. IF WE DO, THEN WE WILL SURELY LOSE THIS BATTLE AGAINST AIDS.

WE WILL ALSO LOSE THE GOOD SENSE THAT HAS PRESERVED OUR SOCIETY AND KEPT AMERICANS UNITED THROUGHOUT MANY OTHER THREATS TO OUR PUBLIC HEALTH.

THIS IS MY MESSAGE TO THE PEOPLE WHO EMPLOY AND WHO MAKE UP THE HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE IN THIS COUNTRY. I ASK YOU, AS COMPASSIONATE AND FAIR-MINDED CITIZENS, NOT TO USE YOUR IRRATIONAL FEAR OF AIDS AS A SHIELD BEHIND WHICH TO VIOLATE THE ETHICS OF THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE.

OVER THE YEARS WE'VE TRIED TO ESTABLISH FAIRNESS IN ALL OUR WORK ENVIRONMENTS. WE CAN'T ALLOW THE AIDS VIRUS TO INFECT AND DESTROY THAT ASPECT OF THE AMERICAN WAY.

ON THE CONTRARY, I BELIEVE WE MUST EXERCISE ONLY OUR BEST INTENTIONS ... OUR BEST INSTINCTS ... AND OUR BEST JUDGMENTS, AS WE DEAL WITH THIS TERRIBLE EPIDEMIC. TO DO THAT, WE MUST RE-ASSERT OUR FUNDAMENTAL COMMITMENT TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF HUMAN HEALTH GENERALLY -- AIDS OR NO AIDS.

AND WHAT BETTER PLACE TO START THEN IN THE HEALTH CARE WORKPLACE ITSELF. IF WE DO THAT, WE MAY YET GIVE THE WORLD SOMETHING EVERY BIT AS PRECIOUS AS THE MUCH-DESIRED AIDS VACCINE:

WE COULD GIVE THE WORLD A GENUINE DEMONSTRATION OF THE POWER
OF COMPASSION AND JUSTICE IN THE BATTLE AGAINST DISEASE AND
DISABILITY WHATEVER THE FORM.

THAT'S MY HOPE. MAYBE IT CAN BE YOURS AS WELL.

ONCE AGAIN...THANK YOU.

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