

REMARKS

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THE AIDS BROCHURE AND THE NATIONAL MAILING

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ON OCTOBER 22, 1986, AT A PRESS CONFERENCE MUCH LIKE THIS ONE, I DISCUSSED THE SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT ON AIDS WHICH HAD BEEN REQUESTED BY THE PRESIDENT. THAT REPORT IS AS VALID TODAY AS THE DAY IT WAS WRITTEN. THUS FAR, APPROXIMATELY 19.2 MILLION COPIES HAVE BEEN DISTRIBUTED; SOME BY REQUEST ON THE PART OF INDIVIDUALS OR CORPORATE GROUPS AND OTHERS HAVE BEEN SENT BY CONGRESSMAN TO THEIR CONSTITUENTS. IN ADDITION, THE SURGEON GENERAL'S REPORT ON AIDS HAS BEEN REPRINTED IN MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS ABOUT 20 MILLION TIMES.

THE CONTINUING REQUESTS FOR THIS DOCUMENT AND THE POSITIVE RESPONSE WE HAVE RECEIVED LED THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS TO MANDATE THAT THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, THROUGH THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE'S CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL DISTRIBUTE A NATIONAL MAILING OF INFORMATION ON AIDS TO ALL UNITED STATES HOUSEHOLDS. THIS WAS ENACTED ON DECEMBER 22, 1987.

THE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE HAS COMPLIED, AND NOW FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY, THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS SENDING INFORMATION ON A SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE TO EVERY HOME IN AMERICA. WE ARE TAKING THIS STEP BECAUSE THE EPIDEMIC OF MISUNDERSTANDING ABOUT HOW AIDS IS SPREAD AND HOW IT IS NOT SPREAD SEEMS, AT TIMES, AS DIFFICULT TO CONTROL AS THE EPIDEMIC ITSELF.

IN SPITE OF A STEADY FLOW OF INFORMATION FROM THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE, THROUGH ITS VARIOUS PUBLICATIONS AND SPOKESPERSONS, THE AMERICAN PUBLIC HAS BEEN WHIPSAWED BY PUBLICATIONS FROM THE PRIVATE SECTOR ACCUSING THE GOVERNMENT OF CIRCULATING INACCURATE INFORMATION AND SUGGESTING EITHER THAT WE HAVE SERIOUSLY OVER-ESTIMATED THE PROBLEM ON THE ONE HAND OR THAT WE HAVE WITHHELD INFORMATION ON THE TRANSMISSION OF AIDS ON THE OTHER.

THESE REPORTS, FROM VARIOUS AUTHORS, COULD NOT BE FURTHER FROM THE TRUTH. THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE HAS ALWAYS BEEN UPFRONT WITH THE AMERICAN PUBLIC ABOUT ITS KNOWLEDGE OF AIDS AND WE HAVE NEVER GOTTEN BEYOND OUR SCIENTIFIC BASE IN MAKING PREDICTIONS ABOUT THE FUTURE.

ALTHOUGH I THINK WE HAVE MADE SUBSTANTIAL PROGRESS THROUGH OUR EDUCATIONAL CAMPAIGN ON AIDS, STUDIES TELL US THAT THERE ARE STILL MILLIONS OF AMERICANS WHO BELIEVE YOU CAN GET AIDS FROM MOSQUITOS, BLOOD DONATIONS FOR TRANSFUSION, TOILET SEATS, AND SITTING NEXT TO A CHILD IN SCHOOL.

THE CURRENT BROCHURE WHICH HAS BEEN DESCRIBED TO YOU BY SECRETARY BOWEN IS DESIGNED TO PROVIDE FACTS, TO QUIET FEARS, AND BY DOING THESE THINGS TO LESSEN DISCRIMINATION AGAINST THOSE WHO HAVE AIDS OR CARRY THE VIRUS.

THE LANGUAGE OF THIS BROCHURE IS CLEAR. IT TELLS ALL AMERICANS THAT AIDS IS NOT TRANSMITTED FROM INSECTS, BY DONATING BLOOD, FROM A KISS, OR FROM SALIVA, SWEAT, TEARS, URINE OR BOWEL MOVEMENTS.

THE NATIONAL AIDS MAILING ALSO ADDRESSES A MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM. TOO MANY PEOPLE STILL BELIEVE THAT THERE IS AN IMAGINARY WALL THAT PROTECTS CERTAIN GROUPS OF INDIVIDUALS FROM THE AIDS VIRUS THROUGH SEXUAL INTERCOURSE OR THE SHARING OF PARAPHERNALIA IN THE ABUSE OF ILLEGAL DRUGS.

WE ARE ENDEAVORING TO MAKE EVERYONE UNDERSTAND THAT WHO YOU ARE HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE DANGER YOU FACE OF BECOMING INFECTED WITH THE AIDS VIRUS. WHAT DOES MATTER IS WHAT YOU DO.

SEXUAL INTERCOURSE AND SHARING NEEDLES AND SYRINGES IN SHOOTING DRUGS ARE WHAT SPREAD AIDS. TRYING TO ESTIMATE YOUR CHANCES OF CATCHING THE VIRUS BASED ON THE LATEST MAGAZINE ARTICLE OR NEWSPAPER STORY IS LIKE PLAYING RUSSIAN ROULETTE. BY FOLLOWING ADVICE IN THE BROCHURE, THE READER CAN INSURE THAT HE OR SHE WILL NOT BE INFECTED BY AIDS THROUGH SEXUAL TRANSMISSION AND NEEDLE SHARING.

BECAUSE AIDS IS PRIMARILY A SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASE, THIS MAILING SPEAKS IN FRANK, SIMPLE, CLEAR LANGUAGE ABOUT ORAL, VAGINAL, AND ANAL INTERCOURSE AS WELL AS THE PROPER USE OF CONDOMS. THIS IS INFORMATION THAT EVERY SEXUALLY ACTIVE AMERICAN SHOULD KNOW.

ONE OF THE COMMENTS I FREQUENTLY HEAR FROM PEOPLE WHO SHOULD KNOW BETTER IS THAT EVENTUALLY AIDS WILL AFFECT EVERYBODY. WHAT THESE WELL MEANING PEOPLE MEAN IS THAT THE EFFECTS OF THE AIDS EPIDEMIC, SUCH AS THE DISCRIMINATION AGAINST INDIVIDUALS, THE COST OF THE DISEASE, THE ETHICS OF THE DISEASE, AND THE THREAT TO OUR SOCIAL COHESION WILL AFFECT EVERYONE. THIS BROCHURE WILL MAKE IT CLEAR THAT IT IS NOT AIDS THAT WILL EFFECT EVERYONE, BUT THE EFFECT OF THE EPIDEMIC OF AIDS THAT WILL EFFECT EVERYONE.

A CAREFUL READING OF THIS BROCHURE SHOULD ENABLE THE READER TO SEPARATE TRUE HEALTH INFORMATION FROM VARIOUS POLITICAL AGENDAS PROMOTED AT THE EXPENSE OF THE PUBLIC'S HEALTH.

I HAVE FREQUENTLY STATED THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF A VACCINE OR A CURE FOR AIDS, THE ONLY WEAPON WE HAVE IS INFORMATION AND EDUCATION. INFORMATION ALONE IS NOT ENOUGH TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF THE HIV. IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE AS AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL, THIS BROCHURE MUST BE READ. IT MUST BE UNDERSTOOD. IT MUST BE DISCUSSED. THE INFORMATION CONTAINED THEREIN MUST BE SHARED WITH OTHERS. THE HOUSEHOLD MAILING OF UNDERSTANDING AIDS IS THE CLOSEST WE CAN COME TO MAKING SOMETHING REQUIRED READING IN EVERY AMERICAN HOME. I HOPE THAT PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS WILL SET A TIME WHEN THEY CAN SIT DOWN TOGETHER AND REVIEW THE INFORMATION IN THESE EIGHT PAGES.

I WOULD HOPE THAT SCHOOLS COULD DO THE SAME THING IN CLASSROOMS WHERE THE AGE IS APPROPRIATE.

I WOULD HOPE THAT INDIVIDUALS WOULD DISCUSS THE CONTENTS OF THIS BROCHURE WITH FRIENDS AND WITH CO-WORKERS.

AND THAT LEADS ME TO SAY SOMETHING THAT MUST CERTAINLY BE OBVIOUS BY THIS TIME TO THE PRESS. USUALLY WHEN WE DELIVER SUCH A BROCHURE TO THE PRESS, THE CONTENTS IS UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL A CERTAIN TIME ON A CERTAIN DATE. WITH THIS BROCHURE WE HAVE DONE SOMETHING ENTIRELY NEW IN THE MANAGEMENT OF OUR PUBLIC AFFAIRS. WE ARE GIVING YOU ADVANCE COPIES LONG BEFORE IT WILL APPEAR IN THE MAIL SLOTS IN THE HOMES OF AMERICA AND INSTEAD OF ASKING YOU TO HOLD IT CLOSE UNTIL A LATER DATE, WE ARE DOING JUST THE OPPOSITE AND ASKING YOU TO GIVE IT AS MUCH PUBLICITY AS YOU POSSIBLY CAN BECAUSE WE WANT THE AMERICAN PUBLIC TO BE AWARE OF THE BROCHURE THAT WILL EVENTUALLY BE FOUND IN THEIR MAILBOX AND WE WANT THEM TO BE INTERESTED ENOUGH, CONCERNED ENOUGH, AND INDEED CURIOUS ENOUGH TO READ IT AND READ IT CAREFULLY AND SHARE IT IN DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHERS AS I HAVE ALREADY SUGGESTED. NO ONE CAN DO THIS AS WELL AS YOU. WE NEED YOU.

I WOULD LIKE TO ADD A WORD ABOUT HOW MUCH EFFORT WENT INTO THE PREPARATION OF THIS BROCHURE. LET ME MENTION FOUR SPECIFIC ISSUES THAT WERE UNDER CONSTANT DISCUSSION BETWEEN OLGIVY AND MATHER AND THOSE OF US WHO ARE CONCERNED ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THIS BROCHURE.

FIRST, PEOPLE RUN HOT AND COLD ON AIDS. THERE IS A PARADOX WHEN IT COMES TO CONSUMER ATTENTION. ON THE ONE HAND, PEOPLE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT AIDS; THEY WANT DEFINITIVE INFORMATION ON A NUMBER OF AREAS, -- PARTICULARLY FROM THE GOVERNMENT. ON THE OTHER HAND, AIDS IS NOT A TRUE PRIORITY IN THE LIVES OF MOST PEOPLE. MOST AMERICANS ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT OTHER THINGS. THE NATIONAL MAILING HAD TO REACH OUT TO READERS, PRESENT VITAL INFORMATION IN TERMS THEY COULD ACCEPT AND UNDERSTAND, AND ATTEMPT TO LOOK AT THE SUBJECT THROUGH THEIR EYES. EVERYTHING ABOUT THE BROCHURE HAD TO ENCOURAGE READERSHIP AND REVIEW.

SECOND, PEOPLE, IN GENERAL, ARE RELUCTANT READERS. THEY GLANCE MORE THAN THEY READ. UNLESS THEY HAVE AN OVERPOWERING DESIRE TO LEARN, THEY TEND NOT TO STUDY BUT INSTEAD THEY SKIM OVER, THEY GLANCE AT, THEY READ PICTURE CAPTIONS, AND SO ON. WE HAD AN OBLIGATION TO TRY TO REACH EVERYONE WHO SAW THE BROCHURE. WE ATTEMPTED TO DEVELOP A LAYOUT WITH AN APPEAL TO GLANCING READERS AND NOT JUST SERIOUS STUDENTS OF AIDS. WE TRIED TO MAKE IT PROCLAIM "WE KNOW WHAT YOU'RE INTERESTED IN, -- HERE IT IS, READ IT."

THIRD, AIDS IS A COMPLEX SUBJECT. IT IS REALLY SCORES OF SUBJECTS IN ONE. IT HAS MANY DIFFERENT FACETS AND IT CANNOT BE OVER SIMPLIFIED. AIDS CANNOT BE REDUCED TO ONE SIMPLE NOTION LIKE "DON'T START FOREST FIRES"; "DON'T DRINK AND DRIVE"; OR "DON'T USE DRUGS". AIDS IS EVER SO MUCH MORE COMPLEX. EACH DIFFERENT ASPECT SEEMS TO BE AS IMPORTANT AS THE NEXT AND EACH ONE CAN HAVE A LIFE OR DEATH RELEVANCE. WE HAD TO FACE THE OBLIGATION OF NOT ARBITRARILY ASSIGNING IMPORTANCE TO ONE TOPIC OVER ANOTHER, ON THE ONE HAND, NOR ON THE OTHER, TO BURY INFORMATION SUCH AS HIDING FACTS IN SMALL TYPE AND LONG PARAGRAPHS WHEN THAT INFORMATION MIGHT BE EXACTLY WHAT THE READER NEEDS TO KNOW. WE HAD THE OPTION, AND WE TRIED TO USE IT, OF GIVING THE READER THE CHOICE OF WHAT HE WANTED TO PICK AND CHOOSE.

FOURTH, WE WANTED THIS TO BE A CHATTY DOCUMENT NOT A MEDICAL SEMINAR AND INDEED NOT A SERMON. CERTAINLY THE CONTENT WAS CRUCIAL BUT SO WAS THE TONE OF VOICE. THE ADVICE COULDN'T BE IMPRACTICAL OR UNWORKABLE AND EVEN THOUGH THE SCIENTISTS AND THE MORALISTS WALK HAND IN HAND IN THE CONTROL OF AIDS, WE COULD NOT MAKE MORAL JUDGEMENTS.

I THINK WE SUCCEEDED IN USING SIMPLE LANGUAGE, SIMPLE WORDS, AND USED THEM IN A CARING, CONVERSATIONAL, COUNSELLING TONE SO THAT THE INFORMATION PROVIDED COULD BE APPLIED TO THE READER'S LIVES. WE KNEW WE SHOULDN'T SOUND LIKE RESEARCHERS OR PREACHERS, BUT WE EVEN TRIED NOT TO SOUND LIKE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS.

AS TO LAYOUT THEN, EACH TOPIC HAS BEEN GIVEN RELATIVELY EQUAL IMPORTANCE, INDIVIDUAL SECTIONS ARE BROKEN OUT, ASSIGNED EQUAL STATUS, AND DISPLAYED ACCORDINGLY. NOTHING IS BURIED.

WE APPEAL FIRST TO THE GLANCING READER. THIS IS NOT A MEDICAL TEXT AND WE KNOW READERS WON'T STUDY IT. THEREFORE, THE LAYOUT ENCOURAGES READERSHIP BY PROMINENTLY DISPLAYING SUBJECT MATTER.

INASMUCH AS VERY FEW ILLUSTRATIONS ARE RELEVANT TO THE NEEDS OF THE READER, WE THINK THE LAYOUT ACKNOWLEDGES THE DIFFICULTY IN HANDLING A PRIMARILY VERBAL PRESENTATION THROUGH VARIETY, INFORMALITY, AND ATTRACTIVENESS.

A GREAT DEAL OF TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE WENT INTO THE TYPOGRAPHY WHICH MIGHT BE SUMMARIZED AS BEING SIMPLE, PLEASING, AND YET TRADITIONAL.

THE PHOTOGRAPHS ARE INTENDED TO IMPROVE THE PRESENTATION BY INTRODUCING REAL LIVING PEOPLE IN A CREDIBLE HUMAN WAY. CAPTIONS IN THE FIRST PERSON MAKE A POINT, AND IN DOING SO, SHARE A PREVENTIVE IDEA OR DEBUNK A MYTH.

FINALLY, THE PHOTOGRAPHY AVOIDS TARGETTING AND WE HOPE YOU'LL THINK THE PEOPLE IN THE PHOTOGRAPHS REPRESENT THE AMERICAN MOSAIC AND ENCOURAGE ACCEPTANCE OF THE BROCHURE BY ALL AMERICANS BY AVOIDING STEREOTYPES OR IMPLYING THAT INDIVIDUALS ARE MEMBERS OF GROUPS PRACTICING HIGH-RISK BEHAVIOR.

I THINK YOU WILL ALL AGREE THAT I HAVE BEEN LAVISH IN MY PRAISE OF THE WAY THE PRESS HAS HANDLED THE SUBJECT OF AIDS IN THE PAST. I REALLY DON'T KNOW HOW YOU SUSTAINED THE INTEREST OF THE PUBLIC FOR AS LONG AS YOU HAVE AND NOW WE NEED YOU ONCE AGAIN. YOU'VE DONE A CREDIBLE JOB IN EDUCATION. BECAUSE OF ALL THIS, AND BECAUSE I SINCERELY BELIEVE IT, I HOPE THAT YOU WILL JOIN ME AND GET BEHIND THIS EFFORT AND DO EVERYTHING YOU CAN TO MAKE THE AVERAGE AMERICAN EAGER TO FIND THIS BROCHURE IN HIS MAIL. BE SURE TO TELL HIM IT'S COMING, AND PLEASE NOT CALL US FOR AN ADVANCE COPY.