

It's up to you!

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Americans enjoy one of the greatest health-care systems in the world and employ the largest research community ever assembled. This is part of an effort to guarantee good health for all. But the best physicians and scientists still cannot prevent the deaths of more than eleven babies per 1,000 live births in the US, the annual deaths of almost 120 adolescents and young adults per 100,000 population, or the high mortality rate among others due to stroke, cancer, and other diseases.

It seems to be that one important ingredient has too often been missing in equations for good health: the individual. More and more the medical community and the general public are becoming aware that science can guarantee no cure, or panacea, to eliminate disease and prolong life.

Certainly we continue to make modest gains through important research and attention to quality care. Overall, life expectancy at birth continues to increase, infant mortality continues to decline, and even the death rates for cancer have decreased or leveled off. But the greatest gains in the health status of Americans as well as citizens of other countries would now appear to be in the hands of the public itself as each of us, individually, realizes that we may not be the masters of our fate but surely can improve our health by making wiser decisions in our life-styles and in the habits that directly affect our opportunities for good health.

It's no secret that smoking is a major concern of mine. I consider smoking, in fact, to be the number one public health problem in the United States. It will be responsible for more than 300,000 deaths this year—*preventable* deaths. If smokers could see an emphysema victim gasping desperately for breath—dying slowly from lack of oxygen—they would likely stop smoking immediately. And that's just *one* of the diseases associated with smoking cigarettes. Lung cancer, heart disease, other forms of cardiovascular disease, chronic bronchitis, and ulcers of the gastrointestinal tract are others.

Our efforts to prevent disease and promote healthful life-styles are concentrated in every age group of the population, including the elderly. But

I would like to emphasize here some of the efforts aimed at children. Not only do these efforts fit in with the Kiwanis theme, "Make Every Child Special," and the program "Share Good Health with Children," but they are the logical place to start if we are to pass on a legacy of life that is available to all at a price that is affordable.

Immunization is an example. More than 90 percent of American children are now immunized against the major childhood diseases by the time they enter school. However, appreciable differences exist in immunization levels among preschool children by race, residence, and family income. We must reach those pockets of low-level immunization if we are to conquer the communicable childhood diseases, and it is through efforts by organizations such as Kiwanis that these groups can be reached and served. It also must be a worldwide effort. My efforts with the World Health Organization and my many years of working with other nations of the world convince me that Kiwanis' efforts worldwide will pay dividends to the future good health of us all.

Other programs of our prevention initiative deal with nutrition, dental health, accident prevention, and medical screening in the Head Start program for underprivileged children, as well as with alcohol and drug-abuse counseling in youth centers for runaways.

Another program that I consider of primary importance is an information campaign called "Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies," carried out with more than fifty private groups to explain health practices to pregnant women.

Given current medical knowledge, high quality prenatal care beginning early in pregnancy holds the greatest promise for improvement. This care includes counseling the pregnant woman about the effects on her baby of diet, smoking, alcohol, and medications and encouraging her to make necessary changes in her health behavior to help ensure a healthy baby.

The future good health of the world depends upon the health of its children. And they depend on us.