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16/14

Banquet Presentation
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Surgeon General's Conference
Building Community Based Service Systems
For
Children With Special Health Care Needs
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This conference, it's banquet, and it's presentation were all part of my activity that began back in 1982 with the first Surgeon General's Conference on Ventilator Dependent Children. As I've indicated elsewhere in this archive it blossomed into other national meetings followed by regional, state, and local follow-ups.

The conference was a huge affair and the banquet was for 1000 people. Dozens of organizations were represented and for me this overwhelming interest was indeed heart warming as it was for the sponsors. I ticked off a number of them by category rather than by name.

The banquet presentation also permitted me to do several things I had wanted to do. First, was to acknowledge The Kids on The Block. This is a group founded by Barbara Aiello and they put on a presentation with puppets. The purpose of The Kids on The Block is to teach normal children that they have to be tolerant of and extend themselves to take special care of children with special needs. I had worked with these folks for most of the time I was in Washington and one of their puppets, standing about 3 feet tall, was the Surgeon General in summer white uniform. Many times when The Kids on The Block were making a presentation I joined the puppeteers, was the Surgeon General's voice, and manipulated the puppet to give fatherly advice and admonitions to children who came in contact with children with special needs. I acknowledged and thanked them for their service to children and especially for their performance that night.

I then honored three individuals with the highest award that a Surgeon General can give; they were Merle McPherson, Phillis McGrab, and Earl Brewer. These three had been of help to me in many ways in reference to special needs children but they were also my European travel companions as we previously had explored, community-based health services for special needs children in England and the Netherlands.

The rest of the time I had before the microphone I used to summarize the progress we had made in care of children with special needs from that first 1982 conference through a number of steps over the years, recounting some of studies that we had done to show that a comprehensive, coordinated approach to care was cost effective. We really can control cost while ensuring quality of service. I then asked some questions such as who are children with special needs and why build community-based service systems? I talked about the role of health in a community-based system, and then tried to pull it all together at the end showing how what we did could not be done without the commitment and determination of all the children, families, government officials, and providers that brought us as far as we've come.