

Take Good Care of Body; Result Could Be Lower Health Costs

Surgeon General Practices Preventive Medicine in Tulsa

By JAN HOWARD
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Taking good care of your body is the best way to lower health costs, advised Dr. C. Everett Koop, surgeon general and deputy assistant secretary for health in the Department of Health and Human Services, during a press conference at the Excelsior Hotel Thursday.

Koop said Americans receive the best health care in the world but that costs will never drop unless the system turns to preventive health care instead of the current trend of "continual repair" to the body.

"A person is a trinity of body, mind and spirit and as physicians, we should treat the whole person," said Koop. This attitude carries into the goals he has set for his tenure in office. He was sworn in Jan. 21 as surgeon general and received his position in the department in February 1981.

Foremost, he hopes to improve public awareness of the Public Health Service Commission Corp., founded in 1796 as a rapid deployment service for catastrophe. This group is now 7,200 members strong and has been called out to assist at Love Canal, the toxic waste site, and Three Mile Island.

Koop needed special permission to assume command of the corp since he is at an age, 65, disqualifying him for flag rank under present rules.

A "Magna Carta" is needed to improve the quality of life for the disabled, said Koop, who will work with the departments of health and



C. Everett Koop

education to achieve that goal. Another philosophical change is needed in the way Americans treat the elderly, he said.

As surgeon general, Koop's work for health care quality will go beyond the borders of the United States with international projects for underprivileged countries.

In his push for preventive health care, Koop has been vocal on the deadly effects of tobacco. He is pushing for legislation to force

larger warnings on cigarette packages.

"Smoking will kill 830,000 Americans next year," he said. But he supports the government's tobacco price supports.

"It's not ironic" for the government to warn people of smoking and legislate price supports. Price supports don't make people, whether young or old, smoke.

If the price supports were dropped, then the price of tobacco would go down. If tobacco prices go down, then the farmer must grow more tobacco to maintain his income. Many more cigarettes would be available at a much lower price, he explained.

"We know the cause but we don't know the mechanism of the production of a cell to a cancer cell," he said when questioned if there was new evidence that smoking causes cancer.

Another controllable cause of death in the United States is alcohol. Half of all highway accidents are alcohol-related, he said. States that have raised the drinking age from 18 to 21 have found a 10 percent drop in teen-age mortality, Koop said.

When Koop assumed the post of surgeon general he promised Richard Schweiker, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, that he would not use his new job as a pulpit to speak against abortion.

He does call himself the "most outspoken physician in American

on antiticide" and denounced euthanasia techniques used recently to allow a severely handicapped infant to starve to death. Because of this and other incidents, the government has now adopted a policy to without federal funding from the hospital where the practice is performed.

"If we are willing to let a child starve to death because his quality of life isn't up to ours — how soon will we let that work for the elderly?" he asked.

He does believe in death with dignity, saying he has always practiced medicine to give them the best available care but not to prolong the act of dying.

He addressed this during a

speech, "Cancer in Childhood — A Catastrophe in the Family." Anything a physician can do to help the family and the patient through such a trauma is beneficial to the entire medical profession, he said.

The physician must lessen the pain and guilt of the child's death felt by the family and to help them "close the circle" of that experience.

When Koop began practicing 35 years ago, he was only the sixth man in the United States to devote his entire surgical practice to pediatrics. Koop has developed most of the surgical procedures on infants that now boast a 95 percent survival rate.

Koop was in Tulsa to speak at a joint session of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, the National Association of Advisors for the Health Professions, and the Central Association of Advisors for the Health Professions. The theme of the conference is "Beyond Competence: The Complete Physician."