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Juvenile Diabetes
The White House
06/07/99

Juvenile Diabetes Event

Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton
The White House
June 7, 1999

Thank you, Woody. Thank you for your service to JDF [Juvenile Diabetes Foundation]. I'm delighted to be here with Mary Tyler Moore and Dr. Doug Melton and Samantha [Mandel]. And I ran into Senator Reid as he was leaving because—I apologize for being a little late, we were over at the White House Mental Health Conference over at Howard University and got back as soon as we could—and Senator Reid had to go back for some Senate business. But I'm delighted that in the audience we have two members of Congress—Congressman Maurice Hinchey and Congressman Joe Hoeffel—and we thank you for being here.

Also we have George Tenet, who is the director of the Central Intelligence Agency. And we are just delighted to have all of you who are friends and supporters of JDF. I am very pleased that all of you are here today continuing your commitment, and that so many parents, children, scientists and advocates around our country are working with the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation's Children's Congress to cure diabetes and to help those that disease strikes.

We know there are a million people living with juvenile diabetes—and many of them are children. For them, much of the ordinary stuff of childhood may be beyond their experience. But they do have a lot of fears and concerns that live with them every day. For children with diabetes, insulin is more than a lifeline. It is a real, absolute imperative for them to be able to get through their days and to have as full a life as possible. And we cannot rest until we find a cure for juvenile diabetes.

That's why we're here today.

Before I begin, I want to tell you a little bit about the program, because we have three extraordinary speakers. All of them are leading the fight against juvenile diabetes and all have been personally touched by this disease.

Samantha just turned 10 last month, and she has not only been very brave in her battle against diabetes, but she's also reached out to help other children learn about and cope with this disease. We'll be hearing later from her.

We'll also hear from Dr. Doug Melton, the chairman of the Molecular and Cellular Biology Department at Harvard University. He is the father of a son with diabetes, whom I have just met, and a leading scientist who is helping to put us on a fast track to a cure.

And, of course, we are very privileged to be joined by Mary Tyler Moore. As an actress, she has made us laugh and cry. And as an activist and the international chair of the Juvenile Diabetes Foundation, she has helped to educate us all and inspire us to join her in this fight.

So it is my great honor to introduce someone whose grace and commitment has literally touched every single person here. And that is a wonderful woman and great leader, Mary Tyler Moore.

[Mary Tyler Moore speaks followed by Dr. Melton and Samantha Mandel. The First Lady closes the event.]

Oh, Samantha, you did so well! I want to thank you for what you have just said, and more than that, for your courage and your eloquence and your willingness to share your story with so many people, and particularly to talk with other kids. And I know how important that is. I understand that you will be one of 100 children from all 50 states who will be bringing this message about juvenile diabetes to Capitol Hill on June 22 as part of the JDF Children's Congress. And I just can't help but think that if every member of Congress hears Samantha and other children like her, they too will work even harder for a cure and to provide the funding we need. So let's give Samantha another round of applause.

In addition to Samantha, though, I know that there are other children here who are part of the Children's Congress, and I'd like to ask all of the children who are here as part of the Children's Congress to please stand. Let's give all of them a round of applause.

Really, like Samantha, these are the best experts we have on juvenile diabetes; they're the ones who live it every day. They have to give themselves the shots. They have to stop themselves—which is very hard for a child to do when they're in the middle of a great sports event somewhere, enjoying themselves, working and playing as hard as they know how—and check and see how they're doing. So it should not come as a surprise to any of us that the original idea for a Children's Congress came directly from kids like Samantha and all of you. It started with Tommy Solo, a 9-year-old from Boston, who unfortunately could not be here with us today. One day, he asked his mother if kids who have diabetes could come to Washington to tell the people in the government to support research to find a cure. Well, now Tommy's dream has come true.

I also want to thank 8-year-old Joey Silvestri and his parents, Sandra and Alan, who are chairing the Children's Congress. Alan is an Academy Award-nominated composer, and he wrote a beautiful song called "Promise to Remember Me," that has become the theme of the Children's Congress. Just imagine what we could accomplish on juvenile diabetes—not to mention a lot of other really important children's health issues—if every single adult in this country promised to remember the children.

Imagine if all Americans heard the voices of children like Samantha and the others here today. Like many of you, I have looked into the eyes of many children and families who are coping with juvenile diabetes. I have seen the toll it takes and the heartbreak that too often accompanies everyday life.

Any of the children in this room could echo Samantha's story: They live with the pain of insulin injections. They live with the fear that diabetes will take away their health or even their lives. They live with the kind of day-to-day uncertainty that no child should ever face.

But now, because of the people in this room and many others around our country, we are really demanding that we remember the children. And we are grateful for the progress that has been made over the last six years. Gone are the days when people with diabetes were simply told about their blood glucose levels: "Don't let it get too high and don't let it get too low."

Since then, we've learned a lot about how to manage this disease, and to significantly lower the rate and severity of eye, kidney and nerve complications. We've launched a National Diabetes Education Outreach Program, with a wonderful 800 number—1-800-GET-LEVEL—that is helping Americans get the information they need. And we've searched for ways to make the process less painful—whether it is administering insulin through nasal sprays and pills, or reading blood glucose levels without having to prick your finger.

But we have always understood that, while diabetes management can help until we find a cure, it can never be a replacement for a cure. No parent, as we've just heard, wants to see their child suffer and be told that all they can do is just wait; that some day, things might get better. Our objective has been—and must continue to be—finding a cure.

That's why two years ago, the President signed into law legislation which dedicates $150 million for juvenile diabetes research. It's why we have pledged to continue to fight this disease by implementing the recommendations of the Diabetes Research Working Group, which has produced a blueprint to move us down the path toward a cure. And it's why we have dramatically increased funding for NIH research, including a 60 percent increase for diabetes alone.

And it is paying off. Just last week we learned of a remarkable breakthrough. Scientists were able, essentially, to cure diabetes in monkeys. And they did so by giving the monkeys insulin-producing cells along with an experimental drug which stopped them from rejecting the transplant. As many of you know from painful experience, right now the drugs used to prevent transplant rejections have serious side effects and leave the patient vulnerable to infections. What this breakthrough offers, though, is not only hope for people with diabetes. It also could increase the likelihood that people will end up with organ transplants they can successfully tolerate, as well as resulting in new treatments for auto-immune diseases, including lupus, multiple sclerosis, and rheumatory arthritis.

So we are very heartened by what we are hearing out of Harvard and other places around the country. But we should understand that this discovery is the product of two decades of NIH research. Therefore, I am pleased to announce today that NIH will soon award $120 million for clinical trials to move this breakthrough from the laboratory into the homes of the children who need it. This award will be a seven-year contract given to an international consortium of investigators. And it was only possible because of the bipartisan consensus between the

President and the Congress that led to a $30 million increase in NIH funding for diabetes research this year.

We have a number of the researchers from NIH here and I'd like to ask them to stand, because they've been on the front lines of fighting this disease.

Our hope is that these advances will lead to a cure for diabetes, so that children like Samantha will have to turn to history books to show their children what it meant once to have daily insulin shots.

That is the dream that the Children's Congress will bring to Washington in a few weeks. They will testify before Congress. They will meet with their representatives. They will sing that beautiful song, "Promise to Remember Me," on the Capitol steps. And they will bring thousands of letters to explain what it is like to live with diabetes.

I'll never forget the letter that I received from Joey Silvestri. He wrote, "Every night my little brother and I say our prayers. My little brother James always prays for a Pokeman toy. My sister prays for good grades. But I pray for a cure for diabetes. My mom says I can ask for other things, but I don't want anything as much as I want a cure for diabetes."

Well there are children like Joey all over the country and right here in this room. They are praying for their health. They are praying for the lives they should be able to have and enjoy –lives without fear or limitation. And they are praying for our help. It is up to us to remember their voices and answer their prayers.

With the JDF continuing to lead the way, and the researchers on the front lines giving everything they possibly can to this incredible effort to find a cure, I know that day will come when we stand with these children and do everything we possibly can imagine to make it possible for our scientists and our researchers to have the tools and the resources they need.

Thank you very much for your commitment to that fight.