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Charles Drew University

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

CHARLES DREW UNIV. (L.A.)
July 19, 1993

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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

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REMARKS BY THE FIRST LADY
AT CHARLES DREW UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE AND SCIENCE

Los Angeles, California

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you, Vincenzo, and thank you all who are faculty and students and supporters of this university. It is a great privilege for me to be here today, because you do represent the kind of partnership between health care and our communities that has to be the hallmark of what we are moving toward in this country.

I was privileged, before addressing you this morning, to visit some of the programs that this university supports in encouraging young people like those who are here on the stage with me, high school students, and college students to consider careers in medicine and science through their exposure to clinical work and laboratory work.

It was very exciting, because I talked with young people who are committed to finding cures for cancer, who are committed to doing what they can to try to turn around the conditions that they see in the health care system today.

And then, coming here, and having an opportunity to address you, just pulls the whole morning together for me, because I see in front of me young people, and those not so young, who will be taking their places in this community and other communities at a time of very exciting change in our country.

It is no secret to any of you that we are engaged now in an effort to reform our nation's health care system. Those of you who are here at this University, perhaps more than most Americans, see on an everyday basis the reasons why the President is committed to making these changes.

You see the people who are shut out of the health care system. (Applause.) You see the institutions that are over-burdened

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to the point of breaking because of their incapacity to care for those who come flooding through their doors. You see the wasted lives and the broken dreams of people whose health doesn't permit them to go on to gainful employment or to make out of themselves whatever God intended them to be. You are here on the front lines.

What I would like to do for just a few minutes is to talk with you about what we see as a vision for health care in our country. We will need your help, not just those of you who intend to become professionals in health care, but all of you -- community members, journalists, business leaders, political leaders. All of us will have to be committed to making the changes required.

You know that in our country we have, probably, the finest health care available anywhere in the world, if you can get it. (Applause.)

We are at the top of the curve when it comes to research. We can do procedures and the kinds of extraordinary interventions that were only dreamed of a few years ago. You are studying it. You can watch it happen.

I read of a graduate of this University, a Dr. Clayton, who performed an extraordinary operation when a young girl, the victim of a stray bullet in the kind of mad and crazy violence that afflicts too many of our cities, including this one, came into the hospital, a bullet in her heart.

And what Dr. Clayton was able to do was, through extraordinary intervention, keep that young girl alive and, hopefully, put her on the path to recovery. That could not have been done without the advances that have occurred and without the training that doctor received here. (Applause.)

So we do have the best that can be available in medical care anywhere in the world, and we must never, ever let that high standard fall. We must always maintain quality in our health care system. We must always provide the state-of-the-art kinds of health care that our people deserve.

But that is only part of the story we have to tell, because we have too many people who do not have access even to basic care. They do not have the kind of primary and preventive health care that will enable them to remain and stay healthy.

They too often use the emergency room at King and other hospitals as their primary care physician. They walk in there too late to really get help, taking up space that should be reserved for

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the bullet wounds in the heart that are true emergencies, because they have nowhere else to go. (Applause.)

So we have to take our system and make it available to everyone, with an emphasis on primary and preventive health care, delivered in a community setting that will reach every American when that person needs health care. (Applause.)

Now, some people think that this reform effort that the President put in motion by creating a task force committed to studying what needed to be done, that Dr. Tuckson (phonetic) and John Garamendi (phonetic) and other leaders in this community and this state have helped with, was really only aimed at making sure that we could provide access to those who did not have access now, the 37 to 40 million Americans who are not insured.

But, you know, in today's world, there is nobody here in this audience who will really be able to say with any certainty that you will be insured yourself next year. You know, it's really unclear at all, given the changes in the economy, given what is happening around the country with increasing health costs, that even those of us who have insurance today will have it this time next year.

I often think, as my father used to tell me, that in most instances, if you stop for a minute and look at somebody and say, "There, but for the grace of God, go I," you get a pretty clear idea of where you stand in life, because so much of what we have today may not be available unless we work to keep it, and that is true with health care.

So this is not just about making sure the millions who do not have insurance receive health care coverage, this is making the case that, for every American insured today or uninsured today, we want to guarantee health security so that no one ever needs to be afraid again they will not have access to quality health care. (Applause.)

In order to do that, we have to make everybody part of the same community, so that everybody gets health care. In order to achieve that, we have to have a package of benefits that is available to every American, no matter where you work and no matter whether or not you've ever been sick before.

You know, one of the great ironies today is, if you've ever been sick before, you're less likely to get health insurance than somebody who has never been sick. It always struck me as a little bit odd that you would get the kind of health care that would

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protect you if you had shown over the years you didn't need it, but you couldn't get it if you had ever been sick and might need it.

We need to eliminate what are called preexisting conditions that prevent people from getting health care insurance. (Applause.)

So we need universal access for every American. We need a package of benefits that is guaranteed to every American, no matter who you are or where you work or whether you have had an illness or a problem in the past, and the package of benefits needs to emphasize primary and preventive health care.

We have gotten ourselves into a situation where you can get coverage for a heart bypass, but you don't get coverage for immunizing your child. You can get coverage if you have a stroke, but you don't get immunized for the kind of general tests that might tell you whether or not you're a candidate for a stroke. You can get coverage if you have breast cancer, but you may not have coverage for a mammogram. We need to emphasize primary and preventive health care and diagnostic tests that will enable us to take better care of people earlier. (Applause.)

We also need to be sure to insure choice, so that individuals will have choices among the health plans that are available to them. Very often today, if you do have insurance through an employer, you are finding your choices more and more limited. You are told who you can go see, what plan you can choose, and how you can get health care delivered.

We want to retain choice, so that you can choose among different kinds of plans and choose among the doctors and other health professionals that you would like to have take care of you. We think choice is an important part of what an American health care plan should look like, and so we want to insure that.

We also want to guarantee that it is simpler than what we currently have, particularly for those of you who will be the professionals of the future. The average nurse and doctor now spend an extraordinary amount of their time and often their income filling out the forms that have to be filled out to satisfy the government and private insurance companies that require all those forms. (Applause.)

We want to simplify the paperwork, reduce the bureaucracy, enable those of you who will be health care professionals to spend your time taking care of patients instead of filling out forms. We think that's a much better use of your training and education. (Applause.)

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If you had wanted to be a bookkeeper or an accountant, you could have gotten a different kind of education than trying to be a doctor or a nurse or other health care professional. (Applause.)

We also are going to require everybody to contribute and participate in this health care system. For most people, that will mean some kind of financial contribution. Everybody will have to be responsible in some way.

But it will also require, even from those who cannot necessarily make a significant financial contribution of any kind, that all of us be more responsible for our own health care. Each of us is going to be asked to start taking better care of ourselves and the people around us. (Applause.)

That operates on two levels. That operates, certainly, on the individual level. Personally, we should all eat better, exercise a little more, try to reduce that stress as much as possible. We are learning a lot about what those simple kinds of changes in lifestyle can do to improve your health.

I recently was in Hawaii. Some of you may know that Hawaii is the only one of our states that comes anywhere close to near-universal coverage. About 98 percent of all of the people of Hawaii are covered by health care insurance. They have an employer-employee-based plan in which people participate with the employers and the employees making contributions.

Because they have everybody in their system, they all are able to provide better health care, because they get people to the doctor sooner than we do in the rest of the country. So they live longer, and it's not just because it's a beautiful island state. They live longer because they get better primary and preventive health care.

But, even there in Hawaii, they are learning that just going to the doctor is not enough. You have to help take care of yourself. Hippocrates said that, that the physician and the patient are responsible for health care.

So, in Hawaii, one of the things that I learned is that native Hawaiians have the highest rate of diabetes in the world, because they changed their diet so dramatically in the last 200 years.

So, now, what are we trying to do in a place like Hawaii that has universal coverage, we don't have the people falling between the cracks, as we do here in California and elsewhere?

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Now, we are attempting to take these people who are paying less per capita for health care than the rest of us, who are living longer, and doing even more by changing how they themselves make personal decisions. So that, for example, native Hawaiians who go back to the diet of their ancestors -- fish and the kinds of fruits and vegetables that traditionally were eaten -- have dramatically improved health outcomes when it comes to cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

Research is being done in this state which shows that you not only can stabilize heart disease, but reverse its effects, by changes in diet and increases in moderate exercise. Those are the kinds of things that people are going to have to do in addition to the obvious, which is to quit smoking, don't drink to excess, and stay away from drugs. (Applause.) Those are some of the things we all are going to have to be committed to doing. Responsibility also operates on a community level.

You know, it is a public health problem that we have the level of violence we do in a community like this. That is not just a criminal law enforcement problem, it is a public health problem. When the single leading highest cause of death for young African-American men between the ages of 18 and 30 is homicide, that is a public health problem. (Applause.)

So, in part, what we have to do is not only commit to taking better care of ourselves, we have to commit to taking better care of each other and making it possible for our children to grow to adulthood with the kind of lives we want them to have. Health care is a part of that, but so is making sure our communities are good and safe and nurturing environments for children and adults to live in together.

So, part of what health care reform is about is not just changing bureaucracies, not just providing access to people, not just emphasizing primary and preventive health care through your training, but it is making sure we all become more responsible.

I have a vision, not just of a health care system that finally works better for all Americans, and not only one that makes it possible for all of us to be more responsible, contributing to our own health and the health of others, but for that kind of principle to spread through our larger society, so that once again we can see, not just in single locations like Drew University, the kind of cooperation and inspiration that I sense here, but that will spread out into our entire community, our state and our country.

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We have to care about each other, and we have to care for each other. Health care is one way to symbolize and demonstrate that. I hope that, with the work that is being done here at Drew, you will lend your voices and strong support to the concepts of health care reform that the President will come forward with.

You will stand firmly beside him and us as we struggle against the obstacles to bring about the kind of health care system that America deserves to have, and that each, in our own way, will make a commitment to have healthier lives ourselves and to make a contribution to improving the health of those around us.

Thank you all. Good luck and God bless you.
(Applause.)

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