

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

5/1/95
MAMMOGRAPHY AWARENESS
CAMPAIGN KICK OFF

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

May 1, 1995

**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton at Medicare
Mammography Awareness Campaign Kick-off**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you very much. Thank you so much for being here for this important and, in many ways, unprecedented event. I want to thank Secretary Shalala for her leadership in so many areas, but as she mentioned, when the President announced the National Breast Cancer Action Plan from this room and asked the Secretary to please begin to do all that we could in the federal government to not only get word out about breast cancer, but to begin a really concerted effort to turn all of the forces of the federal government toward research to find a cure to understand this disease -- Secretary Shalala really took that and ran with it, and we're very grateful to you.

I also want to acknowledge Bruce Vladick and Dr. Helen Smiths from the Health Care Financing Administration. That is the agency that pays the Medicare bills, that tries to compile information so that we know what's really happening with people in our country when it comes to health, and they are very much involved and committed to this effort, and I'm very grateful for that.

I also want to thank Dr. Susan Blumenthal and the Public Health Service's Office on Women's Health, which has played a major role in bringing to all of our attention the issues affecting women and our health, and I know this is a very big week for older Americans, because it is the White House Conference on Aging. And Fernando Torres Gil who is here, is the man responsible for making sure that this week happens, and he seems remarkably relaxed, and so I'm glad to welcome him here to join all of us.

We are kicking off the Clinton Administration's "Mommagram" campaign. And that is a very carefully chosen phrase, because it really says what we want it to say. We are concerned about our mommas -- whether we call them mothers, mommies, moms, whatever, we are concerned about all of the women in our country, and particularly older women. And we want this campaign to increase awareness of the importance of mammography among our nation's older women.

The threat of breast cancer, as the Secretary points out, is one that touches every single American. We all know someone -- a grandmother, a mother, a sister, an aunt, a daughter, a friend, or in my case, my mother-in-law, who has suffered or is suffering from this disease. But what many Americans do not know is that the risk of

MORE

breast cancer increases with age. In fact, 80 percent of new breast cancers occur in women aged 50 and older, and half of all new cases occur in women 65 and older.

That is why, thanks in large part to the advocacy of many organizations represented here today, mammography was added to Medicare in 1991 as one of the few preventive or screening services that Medicare offers. And that is why, as I worked on health care reform, I was distressed to learn that fewer than 40 percent of women aged 65 and older on Medicare have used the Medicare mammography benefit.

Over the past months, I looked at studies on barriers to mammography use among older women, and I talked to women all over the country of different backgrounds and races and different regions who had different experiences with mammography and with breast cancer. I believe that through these meetings, which we called "listening sessions," because that's what I was doing, we could gain a better understanding of how we could increase the use of mammography by going to the people who were the experts -- the women themselves.

I learned a great deal from these sessions, from the physicians and nurses and women who took part in them, from the advocates representing organizations, and the entire government did as well. Because we heard that older women, like the rest of us, value the advice of their doctors, and that a great number of older women will get a mammogram if their doctors recommend it.

We learned that some older women don't realize that you never outgrow the need to protect yourself against breast cancer, and that some women mistakenly believe that mammograms are extremely painful or even dangerous, that they, themselves, can cause breast cancer. Some women fear getting a mammogram because they believe that finding breast cancer, even in its early stages, is a death sentence. And we learned that some older women, women who have spent their lives caring for others, simply don't know how to take care of their own health by seeking out such services for themselves.

But we also learned that with information and outreach, older women will get mammograms to help them live longer, healthier lives, and our goal is to provide this support and to increase mammography use among our nation's older women. So we are pleased to announce today this awareness initiative.

In honor of Mother's Day and all of our nation's older women, we are kicking off our initiative with a "Mommagram" campaign. The "Mommagram" campaign will give husbands, sons, daughters, grandchildren, friends and anyone else with a close relationship with an older woman a way to let that woman know that her family and friends care, that part of that caring means wanting her to get

MORE

regular mammograms, and that Medicare covers the cost of these mammograms.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of the administration, to thank all of you who have done and will continue to do so much to make this "Mommagram" campaign a success. This campaign has been a wonderful coordinated effort among government agencies and between the government and the private sector. I would also like to thank the health care professionals and their organizations who will be communicating with their members about the importance of reminding their older women patients to get regular mammograms.

As one of the women in one of the listening sessions told me, she says, "I had five things wrong with me, I have five different doctors, I have doctors for my eyes, I have doctors for my heart, I have doctors for my feet, but nobody ever told me to get a mammogram." And so part of our message is for all doctors who take care of women for any problem remind them, please, about mammograms.

I'd also like to thank the senior organizations and cancer advocacy organizations who will be activating their grass roots networks to get the message out. This is very important, because you're really there on the front lines, talking with women every single day. Many of you have worked very well on your own excellent breast health awareness campaigns, and we appreciate your additional efforts on behalf of this as well.

I'd also like to thank the creative public relations professionals who donated their time and effort to design the "Mommagram" campaign. You can see one great example behind me. And the generous corporations and trade associations who have provided funding or are distributing and displaying the message or the materials that have been developed for this campaign.

And I would most certainly like to thank the women who participated in these listening sessions. Some of them were able to be with us today, and I would like all the women in all the listening sessions to please stand, because it is your help that made this day happen. (Applause.)

I would also add, we had a really good time, and some of what was said and some of the stories that were told, we couldn't publish in the form that they were -- (laughter) -- but I will never forget them. And I hope that all of you know how much we appreciated your taking your time and sharing very personal information with us.

Our efforts will not end with Mother's Day. The "Mommagram" campaign is just the first stage in a year-long Medicare mammography initiative that will include outreach through Medicare carriers and intermediaries -- those are the insurance companies and the other folks who process the bills and do what needs to be done in order to

MORE

get Medicare to work for you, through state health departments, local aging agencies, and we hope many of you here today.

I also know there are many women -- and we have just had very strong evidence of that published in a recent article -- who are living on bare-bones budgets in their later years, and they are finding it very difficult to meet the deductible cost on Medicare and the small copayment for a mammogram. Probably the most difficult and poignant moments in those listening sessions were when women stood up and said, "I was diagnosed with breast cancer, but I didn't have insurance, and I waited until I was eligible for Medicare." Or, women who stood up and said "I have a history of breast cancer in my family, but at the end of the month, I just can't afford, even with Medicare's help, to pay for a mammogram."

I hope this campaign will help us focus national attention on not only the benefit that is available through Medicare, but also the need to make sure that every woman is able to take advantage of that benefit. We applaud the many local programs that I learned about around the country that offer free mammography screening, and I know that the many partners in this effort here today and those unable to be with us, will do everything that we can do together to assist in finding ways to cover the costs that Medicare does not now pick up.

Hopefully, the day will come when the government will be able to meet the needs of all women, or there will be other changes that will permit a service such as Medicare's mammography benefit to be accessed without any financial barriers.

As I think about this campaign, I can't help but also think about the voices we're hearing in Washington today that are trying to tell us that there is nothing the federal government can do for people. I think the Medicare mammography benefit belies that. And I think this awareness campaign does, too. Working together with local government and the private sector, we can use the Medicare mammography benefit to save lives. And that is very important to all of us.

We have here today someone I met in our listening sessions, and whose words and thoughts helped us shape this campaign. I'd like to welcome Zinny Cummings (PHO.) from Church Women United, a brave and determined woman who is one of mammography's success stories.

Zinny, would you please join us here at the podium?
(Applause.)

(ZINNY CUMMINGS SPEAKS)

MRS. CLINTON: I'm so glad you got on that airplane.
(Laughter.) One of the items that Zinny referred to was a video, news

MORE

release that we put together by the Department of Health and Human Services, which gives a bit of a flavor about what we heard in all of these listening sessions. And I think we're going to be able to play it right now and show you on these two screens.

(VIDEO SHOWN)

Thank you, Jackie, for you and your crew doing such an excellent job on that. We started our first listening session in New York, and I was pleased there to hear from a number of women who have been active in various organizations that are advocates on behalf of older women and on behalf of cancer. And one of those women from the Older Women's League is Lou Glass (PHO.) And, Lou, I'd like to introduce you now to our audience. Please join us here. (Applause.)

(JACKIE SPEAKS)

And that's such an important point that Lou just made is the peace of mind that comes from doing this for yourself and finding out there isn't anything wrong, and that's an important point that we want to stress today.

As has already been mentioned, the President and I have a very personal interest and commitment to this issue, because my mother-in-law, Virginia Kelley, died in January of 1994 from breast cancer, and so we were very intimately involved with her and her disease over a number of months. She, as any of you who ever met her would know, she never wanted to have anybody feel sorry for her or in any way stop what they were doing because of her battle with breast cancer, and she was a great inspiration to us in the last years of her life as she was during her entire life.

And in our efforts to try to reach out to women around the country, we thought we would tell our own personal story about this because perhaps all of the talking and all of the statistics and all of the effort that has been put into mammography for all women, particularly older women, may not make the impression on some women that a personal story does. So we have, with the help of some very creative people, done some PSAs that I hope will, in their own way, reach some additional women, and I'd like to show those to you now.

(PSAs are shown)

We hope that other additional ideas for ways of reaching women throughout the country will come forward from this campaign. We want to, in every way we can, to get the word out. Some of the things that you'll be seeing in the Mother's Day part of this campaign are Mother's Day cards that will have inside this special "Mommagram," and so I hope that many, many people buy these cards and send them to

MORE

their mothers and their grandmothers and other women who they appreciate.

We'll be having, with deliveries of flowers on Mother's Day, which I think is probably the biggest day for flowers in the whole country, a mammogram for you which will come with every bouquet and will point out the importance of having a mammogram, and again I think that this is a way that Mother's Day can be celebrated particularly, will have pins that I hope people will wear as --especially those of you in organizations who are working on this will be visiting with women and speaking to groups, many other kinds of brochures that will be put out with our slogan -- "Get a mammogram: a picture that can save your life."

So we are very grateful for everything that all of you have done, and I think each of us has a personal reason for being here today and for being invested in this campaign, and certainly my mother-in-law is my personal reason, along with many of my friends and other women whom I have known.

My own mother couldn't be here. She's much too busy today. (Laughter.) So she's not going to be able to come for Mother's Day until toward the end of the week. And of course, this is, as the President said, our second Mother's Day without his mother. But I think that we need to celebrate all of the mothers who are here, and I asked if there could be one person perhaps chosen to represent all of the mothers, because we'd like to give them a bouquet. And this is really a bouquet for everybody, and this is a total surprise, so I'm sure this woman will say, "Why are you doing this to me," but one of the people from our listening sessions who is here today is LuAnn Richter (PHO.), a 73-year-old breast cancer survivor, and she told us that in her early years, she had regular mammograms but stopped having them because she didn't have any family history of cancer.

Seven years ago, she found a lump through a self-exam, went to a physician, it was confirmed as cancerous, she had a mastectomy. She now has regular mammograms. She is a widow with two children and four grandchildren and a member of the Older Women's League. And LuAnn, if you'll join me, you are our proxy for all of the mothers and grandmothers. (Applause.)

(MRS. RICHTER ACCEPTS BOUQUET)

Well, we are so excited to have all of you here, and I hope that this campaign will be as successful as the efforts that you have invested in it.

I also wanted to recognize another group who is here because of what they had just done, and that's the Inspiration Expedition, a group of breast cancer survivors who climbed the tallest mountain in

MORE

the world, outside of the Himalayas, in South America, and I wanted them to stand, all who were members of this expedition who are here, because we are very proud of you. (Applause.)

So we have much to be grateful for as we approach this year's Mother's Day and we have much to work for as we try to take this campaign to women throughout our country, and I want to thank all of you for making this possible and for being part of such an important effort, and I look forward to celebrating next year as we hopefully see these statistics getting better and better, as we see more and more women taking advantage of these kinds of mammography benefits, and as we move closer and closer to learning about what causes breast cancer and what will cure it for ourselves, our daughters and our granddaughters. Thank you all very much.

###