

195 Women's Health  
Achievement Awards  
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**Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton  
at the 1995 Women's Health Achievement Awards  
Washington, D.C.**

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you George, for that kind introduction. I also thank your organization for its vision in sponsoring these awards and for the index and for other ways in which you are supporting women's health. I am just delighted to be here. I think this is just a significant occasion in so many ways. Though it is especially important now at this time that we reaffirm our commitment to women's health and what the society has already accomplished is certainly a tremendous step forward. But as Phyllis and George have said and as I am sure many of you feel we have a very long way to go before we can say with any confidence that women's health has taken its rightful place in the American health care system.

Much of the credit for the mention of women's health in the 1992 campaign goes to some of the women in this room -- foremost among them Phyllis Greenberger who has been tireless in her advocacy on behalf of the importance of women's health and particularly research into women's health concerns. I am personally very grateful to Phyllis for her articulate advocacy. I'm also appreciative and equally grateful to Dr. Susan Blumenthal for her trailblazing work on behalf of women's health and for the service that she is now performing. And Florence there have already been wonderful things said about you, but I must add to them that your extraordinary commitment to these issues and your personal example in carrying through on them has been very important to the entire enterprise. There are many others of you here, and particularly the award winners whom I congratulate and thank on behalf of men and women for your extraordinary achievements.

I also want to acknowledge among us the presence of Dr. Foster who has himself done a great deal to remind us that even with all of the accomplishments that will be recognized this evening and all the work that's being done in the public and private sector to advance the cause of women's health, there is still not only a

great deal to be done, but a great many women still to be reached, and I think that too has to be part of what we redouble our efforts toward achieving.

This celebration of the achievements of the society are ones that should be celebrated every day if people knew more about what has been accomplished. But I think that as we consider how far we have come, how important the progress has been, and as I thank you on behalf of literally millions and millions of American women who will never hear of the Society for the Advancement of Women's Health Research, I want us to take a few minutes to think about what we have achieved perhaps more importantly to put it into context both here and internationally.

The unpleasant truth, as so many of you know better than I, that the health of American women should be better than it is today and many of you know and your research has proven women have not received the attention both to their illnesses or to the kind of care that they deserve to have.

When it comes to women's health we are still playing catch-up. Illnesses that traditionally affect women have been ignored, and still are ignored. Research has largely focused on men, and it still does. For too long women's health needs have been relegated to the margins of our health care system. I've said this before but it still just is stunning to me how surprised I was to learn early on in my work on health care reform that the early clinical trials on breast cancer had been performed on men. I thought I had misread the article. I thought I was suffering from what happens to people in their forties with my eyesight, or that perhaps there had been some misprint. But when I called and checked on what I had read and learned that it was true, I was even more astonished.

I can recall talking with a good friend of mine, a woman internist, about that and the other discoveries I was making that many of you already knew and asking her as a physician, as a woman physician, whether she thought that in 1993 when I asked her the question women's health needs were being given the attention they deserved. She thought for a minute and she said, "I have to honestly say, no I don't think so because I see it in my own practice when I refer a patient to a specialist, when I ask for follow-up tests. If it is one of my male patients, it is always taken seriously and often times I have to advocate on behalf of my female patients." She said, "I never thought that I would have been in practice as long as I have and still be worried about whether my women patients will get the same treatment as my male patients do."

That story has been repeated to me in different forms in the years since. As I have talked with women from across the country, from all parts of the country from all kinds of

backgrounds, women who have been involved in our health care system who have been battling disease, I have found too often that my doctor's story was confirmed again and again by the experiences of women with whom I spoke.

Now as we look at the state of women's health today, I think that the index that Warner Welcome has done will make a very important contribution because it demonstrates that women's health is not just an issue for the society and for those who already understand what is at stake. But one of your great accomplishments as the efforts of others working with you has been to break through the crust that too often covers the lack of concern about women's health so that women themselves are now becoming more aware and are demanding better care and will be watching to see whether or not funding for women's health concerns is protected.

As a nation we have begun to make a commitment to women's health but it is on fragile ground and it must be protected. The people who will, I believe, be most effective in protecting the advances that have already been achieved will be the people in this room, people from the research community, people from the clinical community, people from the pharmaceutical community, people from the rest of the private and public sector who know what is at stake.

Women's health has been a particular concern of the President as he took office and he has tried to increase attention and funding for women's diseases and for specific women's health concerns. NIH has received increased funding for women's health research and we now have new guidelines to insure that women are included in clinical research trials. As a result there will be more of a focus on women and that will be important to demonstrate how women should be treated in the future.

Funding for breast cancer research at NIH has been increased 65 percent. Additional research and training grants have come through the Department of Defense after receiving petitions signed by 2.6 million Americans, the President asked Secretary Shalala to convene a national conference on breast cancer and that led to the National Action Plan on Breast Cancer. One of its goals is to create public-private partnerships to make significant progress in the battle against this disease.

In addition to the Office on Women's Health that Dr. Blumenthal heads, the administration has established women's health offices in the NIH, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the FDA, and the substance abuse and mental health services.

Women's health issues have to be integrated into the entire government not just put in one office important and symbolic as

that is. We also have to recognize the whole environment of women's health concerns such as domestic violence which is one of the major sources for health problems among women and with the creation of the Office on Domestic Violence we will begin to understand better how to combat this particular epidemic. We also need to be focusing on issues that, for example, Dr. Foster was very concerned with, namely teenage pregnancy and teenage girls activities that lead to health problems.

Now all of these, and many more pieces of what is being put together for the strategy on women's health are at risk because of the challenges to the priorities for funding in the federal government. The President believes that as important as it is to balance the budget it is more important to balance the budget in the right way and that means as a nation we have to continue to invest in areas that will have big pay-offs and two of those areas are education and training for medical research. The budget can be balanced over ten years making significant, significant cuts in most domestic programs but at the same time keeping and increasing our commitment to education and research. That is the real guts of the information age knowledge explosion. And for the United States not to be committed to education and research is to concede that we will not premier in those fields in the twenty-first century.

So part of what we need from those of you who have worked so hard on these issues is to hear voices on behalf of medical research. Point out the importance of what you are doing now and how much more needs to be done. It is also very important to continue to stress that issues affecting women are not soft issues. They are not marginal issues. Health and education of girls and women are central to the development of this country and every other country around the world.

I believe that one of the battles we will have in the next years is to preserve the parity for women's health and women's research that we have not yet achieved but at least are on the road to achieving. But again, you will have to speak out on behalf of what you know to be the truth. Putting women's health on the forefront of the agenda is not only good for women -- that sounds so self-evident that it shouldn't even have to be said -- but women are the primary caretakers. Women are important workers in our society. Their health is as much of an important national priority as many of the other things that we worry about here in Washington.

So I want to not only thank you for what you have already done, but to ask you to redouble your efforts and your public speaking on behalf of these issues, to reach out to members of Congress, in both parties, to help educate them about what you have achieved. I would imagine that many of the new members of Congress would find it astonishing that just a few years ago

there were so commitments made to women's health, and they would not understand how important it is to keep those commitments and that research coming because we are not yet at a critical mass. I'll look forward to the medical breakthroughs and the improved clinical care for women that will occur because of your commitment. But I also know that we're going to have to fight very hard to keep intact what you have already achieved and to provide the opportunity for those achievements to be built on in the future.

Thank you for what you have done. And thank you for what I know this group will continue to do on behalf of women's health.

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