

Colon Cancer Event  
September 10, 1998  
East Room

PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION

**First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton  
Remarks at the Colon Cancer Event  
9/10/98**

I am delighted to have all of you here...

We want to send out a loud and powerful message to the American people. Colon cancer is the second most deadly cancer there is, claiming more than 50,000 lives every year. But it is a disease we can fight and we can beat if it is detected early. Today we come together to launch a national effort to raise public awareness and promote early detection of this terrible, but preventable disease. We are here, quite simply, to help save lives. And I am delighted to have all of you taking part in this very important effort.

I am pleased that we have members of Congress here. I am very grateful for the Congressional support on this particular issue. None of us would be here today, or be so far along in our efforts to combat colon cancer, without the bravery, commitment and leadership of many people in this room.

I would like to give a very special welcome to Katie Couric, who has endured such a deep personal loss. We are all indebted to her for bringing national attention to the issue of colon cancer. And I know Katie has been joined by her family, and Jay's family, and whenever you face any kind of challenge in life, family is often who you turn to, and I know how important that has been to Katie and her daughters, and I am very grateful that all of you could be here for this set of announcements.

I also want to thank Ellen Levine, the editor-in-chief of Good Housekeeping. I told Ellen before I came in, that a few weeks ago in Moscow I participated in a women's round table sponsored by the Russian counterpart of Good Housekeeping. Good Housekeeping is working very hard to get good information to women so they can make good decisions about their lives, and this is another example of this effort to combat colon cancer.

One of the major forces behind this event today has been the National Colorectal Cancer Round table which has been building coalitions of professionals, advocates and voluntary organizations, each of which raises awareness about the benefits of early detection. I want to thank Dr Bernard Levine for his strong leadership as the chair of that coalition.

I also want to say a very special word of welcome to the many cancer survivors and their families who are here with us today. They are living proof that early detection saves lives. And to the many volunteers and advocates who work day in and day out to help us lead longer and healthier lives.

And I want to thank our corporate partners who play a critical role in helping us spread the word about colon cancer. It is fitting that we would begin our program here this afternoon by hearing from someone who has committed her life to improving the health and welfare of America's

families. I have worked with her for many many years. We both served on the board of the Children's Defense Fund, and I have relished the opportunity to work with her over the last five and a half years. She has been a key player in almost every social challenge facing this country today, and has worked toward solutions. Her national pastimes are very impressive, not on the ball field, although she did play a lot of ball, but in the record books of our nation's health. Thanks to her tireless leadership, we have a lot to show for the work we have done in the last five and a half years.

From infant mortality being at an all time low to immunizations being at an all time high, to the National Plan for Breast Cancer, to teen births dropping - there is a long list that she has worked on with the President and many of us to improve the lives of Americans. It is my pleasure to introduce my friend, and the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala....

Thank you Katie. Thanks for using your considerable influence by making it clear that this is not just an event today, it is the beginning of a crusade. It is the beginning, we hope, of a successful national effort that will not only increase awareness, but save lives. And we hope that everyone here, and everyone that will hear about this event will look for a way to participate and contribute to our efforts to make colon cancer something that every American hears about.

According to a new survey by the Gallup organization, that is being released today, nearly 50% of Americans over 50, those considered most at risk, but not exclusively at risk, 50% of that group has never been screened for this disease. We also know that although the cancer occurs equally in men and women, women are even less likely to be screened. Minorities are even less likely to undergo screening. So, we just have a lot of work ahead of us doing whatever needs to be done.

I hope that because we have been here at the White House here today, we have tried to give heart to people who care about their loved ones who have suffered throughout this disease, and understand there is no room left for excuses or embarrassment. Please, don't be embarrassed. Don't put off the test. Do what you can for yourself and your families.

There are survivors here today. Some of them have already been mentioned. Joan Foster is with us. She had a family history of colon cancer and she sought screening. In 1983, a polyp was discovered and removed. Since 1985 she has had periodic screenings that have been normal. Kathy Hochhauser, worried about her cancer during a screening - she has reached her five year survival period. Bob Williams discovered a cancerous polyp after a test, he is now retired and drives cancer patients to their treatments and volunteers at one of the local cancer associations.

We want as best as we can to build our strength to have as much dramatic impact as possible of what this disease does to people every single day. So we are not just here for awareness. We have some announcements to make such as the Public Service Announcement that brought people together to try and create infrastructure for this crusade.

At the federal level, I am pleased to announce the important new \$10 million HHS grant from

the National Cancer Institute and the Gastrointestinal Program Project in Seattle. This money will help scientists identify new ways of determining who is at risk. As Katie said, we need different kinds of test, we need less invasive test, we need cheaper test, we need to have tests we can take anywhere, anytime - mobile clinics - however we can do it to reach as many people as possible. So I want to thank HHS and Secretary Shalala for helping us to begin the process of learning how to do that.

We also have a great deal of cooperation from the private sector as well. This PSA that we just saw is only one tool of trying to get the word out, and I am very grateful for it and for the commitment by NEC and Good Housekeeping to run versions of it. But others in the private sector are also chipping in.

American Airlines have placed a printed version of the printed PSA in its in-flight magazine, reaching as many as 2 million Americans a year. Kellogg Company USA will print public service messages on its cereal packages. American Greetings will create a prescription insert about prevention and early detection, and the National Association of Chain Drugstores will distribute that insert through their pharmacies. Other companies such as Bristol-Myers Squibb, Zeneca Pharmaceuticals, Olympus America, Smith Kline Diagnostics, General Motors and Eli Lilly have also committed to raise awareness about colon cancer among their workers.

These programs, because they are aiding people in their workplace and their communities will make a very real difference in the health and welfare not only of employees, but of the general public, and I really applaud all of these efforts. I am also pleased to announce that the American Digestive Health Foundation, a member of the round table, is launching an internet chat room on colorectal cancer, which will give consumers, cancer patients, family members, survivors and those at risk a new source of important information, and a safe place to engage in real live discussions about the issues they are concerned about.

I also want to take a moment to highlight an event that is going to take place here in Washington September 25 and 26-the largest single rally ever to focus attention on the devastating problem of cancer in America - all cancers - that affect someone we know in this room and beyond. I hope that many of you and all those who hear about this event will participate.

But you know the real hard work depends on our scientists, our physicians, our researchers and others getting the tools they need. Secretary Shalala mentioned it, Katie Couric referred to it - sitting up in the Congress right now, are proposals from this Administration to substantially increase the amount of money we are spending on cancer research. It is added to an already increased base. We are at the breakthrough point of learning about so many different kinds of cancers. I would urge anyone who cares about cancer and its devastating impacts on people in our country, to urge the members of Congress to do what needs to be done to pass the appropriation, to get the money available so that cancer researchers and scientists can do what they need to do on our behalf.

I also want to emphasize a point that Katie made. Just as with breast cancer, the highest risk group are people over fifty, and that risk increases as we age. But just as with breast cancer,

there are many victims of colon cancer under fifty. So this is a strong plea, that anyone with cancer in their family, and I would not limit it to colon cancer - anyone who is in any way at high risk - anyone who has ever had problems associated with the colon or the rectum - I would urge you to urge them to have a screening. And as we have done many times in this room before, I would urge all Americans to advocate for the coverage by their insurance companies for these tests. It is unacceptable.

We know we have a tough fight in this crusade against us. But we also know there are many markers on this road that you have traveled that show we can make progress together. I thank you for bringing your stories, your concern and your expertise to us here this afternoon. I especially thank Katie and her family. And I urge all of us not only to make this a national priority, but a personal priority, and let's pull together, let's make this crusade successful. And now I invite all of you to a reception in the foyer, and a receiving line in the Blue Room, and I invite the pres to go for their test in the Green Room.