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Patsy Fleming Speeches - November 1995

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Remarks

Patricia S. Fleming

National AIDS Policy Director

at

"Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself" Press Conference

November 30, 1995

Thank you Veronica for your participation today and for your leadership on this important issue.

I'm very pleased that we have involved young people in the development of our prevention message. For too long, our approach has been ~~to have~~^{for} adults ^{to} tell young people what they should and should not do. This time we've got it right. When it comes to preventing HIV infection among young people, young people are our best messengers.

As most of you know, tomorrow is World AIDS Day. The theme of this year's commemoration -- shared rights and shared responsibilities -- is very appropriate to our discussion today.

Young people in this country have the right to grow up free of HIV. They have the right to a long and productive life, one filled with joys and challenges. And they have the right to the information they need to protect themselves.

And we all have the responsibility to ensure that happens.

As adults, we have the responsibility to talk to young people and to listen to what they have to say. We have the responsibility to provide them with the kind of information they need to make responsible choices. And we have the responsibility to respect young people's ability to protect themselves.

That's what these public service announcements are all about. They're about giving young people the tools they need to make responsible decisions about their lives and their health.

The data we have discussed today demonstrate more clearly than ever before that we cannot be complacent about HIV and AIDS, especially as it affects young people. We cannot afford to miss any steps along the way, because the price we pay is much too great.

I'd like to take a moment to thank the exceptional team of people at CDC who have worked so hard to put together this campaign -- working with their partners in the community to shape our prevention campaigns and make sure that they work. David Satcher, Helene Gayle, the always fabulous Melissa Shepherd, and her terrific team. They truly are public servants of the highest rank.

Now I'd like to turn the podium back over to my friend, the distinguished Secretary of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, for your questions.

Remarks

Donna E. Shalala

Secretary of Health and Human Services

at

"Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself" Press Conference

November 30, 1995

GOOD MORNING:

Thank you for joining us.

Last week, our nation reached another sad milestone in our fifteen year battle with AIDS.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that more than half a million men, women, and children have now been diagnosed with AIDS, and more than 300,000 Americans have lost their lives to this insidious disease.

This epidemic is taking a particularly heavy toll on young Americans.

In 1993, AIDS became the leading cause of death among Americans between the ages of 25 and 44.

And between 1993 and 1994, the number of AIDS-related deaths in that age group rose from 37,000 to 42,000.

We know that AIDS is only the final stage of a long-term illness that begins with an infection that can occur 10 or more years before diagnosis.

That means that many of the Americans who are dying in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, were infected in their teenage years and their 20s.

The November 24 issue of "Science" includes a new study prepared by the National Institutes of Health that gives us even greater cause for alarm about our young adult population.

The study shows that cases of AIDS have increased much more rapidly among younger individuals born in 1960 or later.

While our AIDS prevention efforts have succeeded in stabilizing or even reducing the rate of infection among older Americans, they are not having the same kind of effect among young adults.

What we have is a generation in jeopardy. And it is up to us to take action now to reverse these troubling trends before we wipe out a new generation of leadership for this country.

The NIH study shows that as each generation of Americans reach their late teens and early 20s, they enter a danger period with very high levels of HIV infection.

We know that prevention efforts work to slow the rate of HIV infection in targeted population groups.

We have seen some remarkable success, for example, among older gay white men, where infection rates were at their highest when this epidemic began and have come down considerably in recent years.

The key to successful prevention efforts is that they must be targeted on vulnerable populations. And they must be sustained over a period of years or, perhaps, even generations.

We cannot stop and start because if we do this epidemic will just keep going and going.

Two years ago, our nation took an important step forward when we launched the Prevention Marketing Initiative, aimed at young adults between the ages of 18 and 25.

We offered young people the tools they need to protect themselves from HIV.

We told young people that delaying sexual activity is the best way to avoid sexual transmission of HIV.

And we told those who are sexually active that they must use latex condoms consistently and correctly to significantly reduce their risk of infection.

This campaign is beginning to work.

We have seen signs of greater understanding of and use of condoms and we have seen promising signs of a growing movement by young people toward delaying sex.

But we cannot stop here.

The NIH study shows that we have a great deal of work to do. So we are rolling up our sleeves and getting to work.

The new campaign we are launching today -- "Respect Yourself, Protect Yourself" -- maintains our focus on young adults and offers them additional tools to help them remain healthy.

I'd like to ask Dr. David Satcher, the esteemed director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, to join me and describe this exciting new campaign.

David . . .