Take Good Care of Body; Result Could Be Lower Health Costs

Surgeon General Practices Preventive Medicine in Tulsa

By JAN HOWARD
World Medical Writer

Taking good care of your body is the best way to lower health costs, advised Dr. C. Everett Koop, surgeon general and deputy assistant secretary for health in the Department of Health and Human Services, during a press conference at the Excelsior Hotel Thursday.

Koop said Americans receive the best health care in the world but that costs will never drop unless the system turns to preventive health care instead of the current trend of "continual repair" to the body.

"A person is a trinity of body, mind and spirit and as we should treat the physician who is the person," said Koop. This attitude carries into the goals he has set for his tenure in office. He was sworn in Jan. 21 as surgeon general and received his appointment in the department in February.

Foremost, he hopes to improve public awareness of the Public Health Service Commission Corp., founded in 1798 as a rapid deployment service for catastrophes. This group is now 7,200 members strong and has been called out to assist at Love Canal, the toxic waste site, and Three Mile Island.

Koop needed special permission to assume command of the corps since he is at an age, 65, disqualifying him for active duty under present rules.

A "Magna Carta" is needed to improve the quality of life for the disabled, said Koop, who will work with the departments of health and larger warnings on cigarette packages.

"In America, the government's tobacco price supports have not been enough to keep tobacco from being sold to young people. But we must require the government's tobacco price supports greater than the cost of the product," Koop said.

"It's not ironic," for the government to warn people of smoking and legislate price supports. Price supports don't make people, whether young or old, smoke. If the price supports were dropped, then the price of tobacco would go down. If tobacco prices go down, then the larger market will use more tobacco to maintain his income. Many more cigarettes would be available at a much lower price, he explained.

"We know the cause but we don't know the mechanism of the production of a cell to a cancer cell," he said when questioned if there was new evidence that smoking causes cancer.

Another controllable cause of death in the United States is alcohol-related, he said. Half of all highway accidents are alcohol-related, he said. States that have reduced the drinking age from 21 to 18 have found a 10 percent drop in teen-age mortality, Koop said.

When Koop assumed the post of surgeon general he promised Richard Schweitzer, secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, that he would not use his new job as a pulpit to speak against abortion.

Koop was in Tulsa to speak at a joint session of the American Association of Colleges of Osteopathic Medicine, the National Association of Advisors for the Health Profession, and the Central Association of Advisors for the Health Professions. The theme of the conference is "Beyond Competence: The Complete Physician."

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