

to a large degree, dependent on the health promotion and disease prevention measures we practice in our youth. In seeking to improve the quality of health for women at risk for osteoporosis, our strategy should include instilling healthful and preventive behaviors in the younger woman. Fortunately, the messages about osteoporosis prevention are becoming more defined for the younger woman in terms of the relationship of calcium and exercise to peak bone mass. We should not lose sight of the special health needs of older and very old women, who may be at risk for fractures associated with this condition.

I would like to recognize the leadership of the FDA

in responding to the Task Force recommendations through this conference, and the 1986 National Conference on Women's Health, which was co-sponsored by the agency and the PHS Coordinating Committee on Women's Health Issues. Through the FDA Action Plan, Dr. Frank E. Young, Commissioner of Food and Drugs, has formally established a priority standing for women's health, and a public health agenda to guide the FDA Women's Health Initiative. With this as a foundation, we are prepared to go forward to meet the problems posed by osteoporosis.

Opening Session:

Science and Education as the Essential Equation for Successful Prevention

ROBERT E. WINDOM, MD

Dr. Windom was Assistant Secretary for Health of the Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC. These remarks are based on his presentation at the FDA Special Topic Conference on Osteoporosis, held at Bethesda, MD, October 30, 1987.

I AM DELIGHTED to address public health professionals who have devoted their talents and careers to improving the quality of life and health for those at risk for osteoporosis.

Through your committed efforts, our knowledge about osteoporosis has advanced significantly. We are able to advise women at various stages of their lives about the specific measures they should take to prevent this condition. We have defined more clearly the roles of nutrition, exercise, estrogens, bone mass, and bone loss measurements in assisting women to avoid the debilitating effects of advanced osteoporosis. We are acutely aware of the importance of patient counseling and consumer education in reinforcing key health messages to women. We recognize, however, that we must continue to increase our understanding of osteoporosis—particularly in such areas as fractures and the prevention and treatment of osteoporosis in the very old.

This conference focuses on the fundamental ques-

tions of health care providers, communicators, and educators:

- "How do I counsel my patients about osteoporosis?"
- "How can I tell who is at risk for this condition?"
- "What are the key preventive measures women should adopt in their younger years? ...at middle age? ...in their later years?" These are practical concerns that will be addressed by recognized experts, to identify the key messages that should be communicated to patients and the public.

Education and prevention must be based upon a sound and substantiated foundation. Too often, there is a "Grand Canyon-sized" gap between science and education. Within this gap, we unfortunately find confusing and conflicting messages, misinformation, health fraud, and unwarranted behavior or lifestyle changes. By basing this conference on a firm scientific foundation, the Food and Drug Administration, and the conference co-sponsors, will greatly enhance the ability of health care providers, communicators, and educators to take meaningful and effective measures to assist women in their individual efforts to prevent osteoporosis.

I applaud your individual and collective contributions to improving the status of women's health, particularly those women at high risk for osteoporosis. Your strong dedication, and often unsung achievements, have done much to enable women to more fully take charge of their health. Through our continued collaboration in addressing the serious problem of osteoporosis, I am confident that the public health community will make a valuable and enduring difference.