
Opening Session:

Confronting the Challenges With Women at Risk for Osteoporosis

FRANK E. YOUNG, MD, PhD

Dr. Young was Commissioner of Food and Drugs, Food and Drug Administration, Rockville, MD. Dr. Young is currently Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health/Science and Environment. These remarks are based on his presentation at the FDA Special Topic Conference on Osteoporosis, held at Bethesda, MD, October 30, 1987

AS THE CONFERENCE CO-CHAIR, I am happy to welcome you to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Special Topic Conference on Osteoporosis, along with my Co-Chair and distinguished colleague, Dr. William A. Peck. In addition to his many honors and distinctions, Dr. Peck is the founding and current president of the National Osteoporosis Foundation, the only national organization specifically devoted to osteoporosis.

I am confident that the outstanding experts who are participating in this conference will provide us with the education messages that can be drawn from science and applied to practical prevention and treatment programs for osteoporosis. Osteoporosis is a serious health problem, affecting as many as 24 million Americans, and constantly challenging us to find ways to prevent needless suffering in the future.

Our best weapons against this disease are research and education. As is true with many of the other health risks that people face, the potential debilitating impact of osteoporosis can often be minimized through timely preventive intervention, and incentives to foster needed changes in health behavior. As members of the public health community, we are the key communicators of needed information that will empower women to more fully take charge of their health, and make informed health decisions.

While the first line of defense against osteoporosis and other serious public health problems is the informed, health-conscious individual, we have a responsibility to inform people about the risks they face, and what can be done to prevent disease. Even though we do not have all the answers—nor, in some instances, the questions—health care providers, edu-

cators, and women themselves can take advantage of our rapidly expanding science base on osteoporosis.

I hope we can take what we learn at this conference and develop coherent, science-based messages that can significantly improve women's ability to help themselves. No matter what your affiliation, you have a vital role to play in fighting this disease.

FDA's Role

FDA planned this conference because women's health is a high priority of the agency, and because I believe that exchanges such as this one will significantly add to our arsenal of weapons against osteoporosis. The goals of this conference mirror FDA's plan of action for the future, in which we are striving first to identify health problems from a solid scientific basis, and then either prevent or resolve them, using our best resources.

FDA has the responsibility of ensuring the safety and effectiveness of drugs and medical devices, and the truthfulness of their labeling and advertising. The approach to osteoporosis prevention is multifaceted, requiring us to:

- Assess the drugs being developed to prevent and treat it, and the devices being used to measure bone loss and bone mass;
- Define the role of diet and food supplements in the disease; and
- Assist women in their efforts to make well-informed health decisions through public information, consumer education programs, and product labeling.

Conclusion

I am confident that we will all learn a great deal about osteoporosis from this conference. The exchanges that take place will help us to apply what we know now, as we chart a course of action for the future. The collaboration formed and strengthened among us at the conference will lead to lasting benefits for women everywhere—particularly for those women at risk for osteoporosis.