

(Delivered by Fran Howard - Williamsburg, Va.)

STATEMENT BY

SENATOR HUBERT H. HUMPHREY

October 28, 1974

I welcome this opportunity to extend warm good wishes to all participants at the Symposium on Unusual and Under-Utilized Drug Information Resources, being sponsored by the Drug Information Association and the Food and Drug Administration.

I believe this symposium of professionals in the academic, research, and governmental areas is of great significance in addressing an increasingly complex and urgent problem: The lack of a central resource to expedite the collation, evaluation, and dissemination of vital information on an ever-increasing array of drugs. I urge everyone at this symposium to concentrate their efforts toward defining concrete steps to solve this problem. Specifically, I propose that serious consideration be given to the development of a national drug information center, building upon the excellent governmental and private sector resources that are ^{at} ready available.

Too often, when Congress undertakes to legislate in the public interest on the use and abuse of drugs, we are confronted with inadequate and sometimes conflicting information.

Too often, when health professionals prescribe drugs, they have at hand only limited facts on the side effects, the consequences of various dosage levels, and the interaction of these drugs.

Too often, when important research breakthroughs in the development and utilization of drugs are achieved, information on these accomplishments is not transmitted immediately to other research programs where such results might be applied to yield a geometric progression in health care knowledge.

Finally, all too often, the consumers of drugs, whether by prescription or over-the-counter, are in ignorance of drug dosage and interaction effects.

Throughout my service in the Senate, I have had a deep commitment to achieving the intelligible communication of vital information within and beyond the fields of health and science -- this is the absolute foundation stone in building the structure of knowledge that leads to human progress and the betterment of society. In 1961, during my service on the Senate Government Operations Committee, I strongly urged Federal agencies to master the scientific revolution in information control, and I stated that the failure to do this was contributing to "unknown duplication and tragic and intolerable waste of men, money, and material." Today, despite major accomplishments in the sphere of information, I regretfully find all too frequently that my criticism still stands.

It was my privilege to co-author the Durham-Humphrey law of 1951 which provided the first protection for the public against habit-forming drugs. Nevertheless, 22 years later, when the American people were becoming profoundly concerned about pervasive drug abuse and narcotic addiction,

I was compelled to assert that "we are confronted by a startling knowledge gap across the Nation about the extent and treatment of the multiple forms of drug abuse and addiction. We must finance an all-out, nationwide program of education and research to close this gap among professionals as well as the general public."

Over the years the Federal government has significantly increased its investment in biomedical research and in finding the causes and cures of major diseases. It has consistently been my belief that this investment should be multiplied. At the same time, however, the effective interpretation and transmission of the information gained from this widespread research remains an elusive goal.

Moreover, we have not moved very far toward sharing this knowledge beyond national borders.

In 1959, I introduced legislation to encourage international cooperation in the conquest of disease and the promotion of health through intensive scientific research. These bills were the outcome of extensive hearings and research undertaken during a Senate international health study, which I was privileged to chair. I am gratified that this work laid a foundation for scientific cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Over the past decade, we have witnessed significant improvements in the international sharing of information in various science disciplines. Certainly, to ^{promote} these networks is to strengthen the bonds of international peace.

But the harsh facts remain -- widespread malnutrition, even starvation, and disease affecting major sectors of the world's population; and international scientific research communication that too often is at a rudimentary level.

An emphasis on health care legislation has been a predominant feature of the 92d and 93rd Congresses.

In the area of immediate significance to this symposium, the Senate has recently taken favorable action on bills to strengthen programs of the Drug Enforcement Administration, and to expand community education programs under the Drug Abuse Education Act.

The Office of Technology Assessment, an agency of Congress on which I serve as a member of the board having oversight, submitted this summer an evaluation of currently available methods for determining in man the bioavailability of the active ingredient of drug products. As many of you well know, such information is related to issues of drug safety, Federal regulatory functions, drug costs, physician prescribing, and drug utilization -- all of which will be of increasing importance over the coming months. Moreover, this information has direct relevance to pending determinations by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare on Federal drug purchasing policy, and with particular respect to the prescription of drugs under the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

Finally, many of you are well aware of further legislation passed in Congress to sustain biomedical and behavioral

research training and health professional manpower resources, to improve our health care delivery system, and to continue to promote health services research, medical libraries assistance, and targetted research on major diseases.

When combined with expected definite action by Congress next year on national health insurance legislation, these steps clearly point to an escalating demand that will be placed upon our scientific and medical information networks.

It is my view that we have not begun to anticipate this demand. I urge all of you at this symposium to recognize its historic significance if it results in the first crucial step being taken toward meeting this urgent national and international requirement. We must begin to communicate, now, for the lives of incalculable numbers of people, and the investment of major national resources, are at stake.

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