

THE PRESIDENT'S COMPREHENSIVE CHILDHOOD IMMUNIZATION INITIATIVE*

As we all know well, immunization is, by all odds, the most effective of all preventive measures available to us today. It is, in fact, the most cost-effective of all medical procedures and, by far, the simplest. However, in our almost universal preoccupation with sickness care, immunization until recently received scant attention and little support either in this or other countries.

As we have begun to debate seriously how we can assure a healthier world and a healthier America, it has quickly become all too apparent that more sickness care and sickness care centers--more hospitals, more clinics--is extremely costly and not a notably effective strategy. The recently released World Development Report of the World Bank makes this point most eloquently. Prevention of disease is the key, and the most powerful of the prevention methodologies is immunization.

The President's decision to give one of his highest priorities to a Comprehensive Childhood Immunization Initiative reflects these realities. It represents, in fact, a first important step in a desperately needed program of health care reform. The initiative provides resources for vaccine purchase so that all children will have ready access to the recommended pediatric vaccines. It

*Combination Vaccine Workshop, NIH, Bethesda, MD, July 28, 1993

provides support for state and local programs to permit them to begin to restructure a fragmented, haphazard system into one which is "user friendly" with community outreach and education programs, clinics which are more convenient geographically and which are open during hours convenient to parents and, most important, where health care providers once again accord immunization the priority it deserves. The initiative provides resources for surveillance of the vaccine preventable diseases with the basic promise that each such case basically represents a failure in the system. By analysis of these failures, programs can then be better tailored to reach those who remain unvaccinated. The initiative provides funds to initiate computerized registries so that immunization delivery can be monitored more closely. And, finally, it provides funds to facilitate needed research for new vaccines and multiantigen preparations as well as extending U.S. assistance for the global polio eradication effort.

Requested by the President for the immunization initiative per se is \$680 million but more important, the proposed budget for immunization for the Department of Health and Human Services in FY 94 amounts to just over \$1 billion, more than twice that of the Federal budget for immunization only three years ago. The NIH budget calls for an expenditure of \$325 million, 25 percent more than last year. In a time of fiscal stringency, this is an exceptional investment.

To me, this initiative represents a truly landmark event coming, as it does, at the dawn of a new era, when the potential of biomedical research for advancing the field of immunization research has never been greater. This potential, as you know, is inherent to the thrust of the Children's Vaccine Initiative.

Having myself been immersed in vaccine programs for the best part of four decades, I can say, without question, that we have never before witnessed such a commitment. At long last, the needed investments are being made.

Now, we must deliver the product and increasing immunization levels of America's preschool children to at least 90% is the critical first challenge we have been given. I'm convinced this is entirely feasible--not as a target for the Year 2000 but as a target to be achieved within the next three years. This will require the vest efforts of all--Federal, State and local governments, private and professional organizations, manufacturers and others, but it is a task that can be successfully achieved. The challenge then follows of expanding the available number of effective and safe antigens and introducing them into the system. Which antigens and in what combination is the subject of the deliberations of this conference.

Clearly, we have, as never before, support at all the highest

levels of government and, likewise, in the Congress. Let this be the decade forever after to be known as the decade which marked a first serious commitment to disease prevention and to immunization.