

Response on Receipt of Honorary Doctor of Science Degree

University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry

May 22, 1977

Mr. President, Mr. Chancellor, Professor Young, Graduates and Guests:

I am deeply appreciative of the great honor which you have bestowed on me today. I am proud to say that the roots of my own career in Public Health and Epidemiology, leading on to direction of the global program of smallpox eradication and eventually to Johns Hopkins, originate here in this University. To the faculty at that time who were to us all both teachers and friends, I offer my thanks.

The imminent victory over smallpox is a tribute to the dedicated work of literally tens of thousands of health workers from around the world who have worked tirelessly in some of the world's most inhospitable places. More than this, it is a very tangible demonstration of how much can be achieved and with how little when, under the auspices of an effective international agency such as the World Health Organization, there is true international commitment and collaboration. The fact that more than 700 WHO staff from 55 countries of every conceivable political persuasion were able to work harmoniously in pursuit of a common goal is hopefully an omen of the future.

To you who are graduating today, I would suggest that in Epidemiology and Public Health, as never before, there is the potential for the same challenge and high adventure which we have experienced with the smallpox program - challenges no less exciting with results potentially even more dramatic. Had smallpox persisted as in 1967 and had we hospitalized each of the patients, more than 1,500,000 hospital beds would have been required. In the all too prevalent climate of enthusiasm for the high technology of CAT scanners and heart transplants, I am confident we would have had much less trouble in obtaining money and support to build the hospitals to treat the sick than to raise the funds needed to prevent the disease. Although attitudes are changing, even today, I regret that we operate basically not a health care system but a sickness care system. I doubt that Mr. Califano would appreciate his agency being labeled the Department of Sickness, Education and Welfare but this is, regrettably, the label which best characterizes it.

With the costs of sickness care now escalating beyond the point which we as a nation are willing to pay, we must turn to the more sophisticated, more difficult problems of prevention and the design of a health care system. For this we need the most able and the most imaginative. To all of you I say the emerging field of health care for the population rather than sickness care for the individual is and will be the real challenge of the next quarter century.

DAH/vrw