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Prevention and Global Health: The Vital Role of Spas

**Transcript of keynote presentation by
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Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. It's a pleasure to be with you. I'd like to thank the Global Spa Summit and Susie [Ellis] for extending me the privilege to be with you today. I'd also like to thank you for your visionary leadership in perpetuating this assembly of excellence now into its second year and bringing the industry together around shared values and principles.

I also want to bring greetings to you from my colleagues Mel and Enid Zuckerman and the family of Canyon Ranch who also are strong supporters of the Global Summit. As I reviewed last year's proceedings and this year's agenda, it is evident that a great deal of due diligence has gone into the selection of topics and speakers. From the diverse pool of options, you have chosen global leaders and topics in all aspects of spa operations, from customizing, connecting, and personalizing services and experiences, to creating unique environments to the best business practices.

Hence the dilemma that I have: how to bring added value to the excellence that has already been exhibited and created in this organization with the distinguished speakers and the cutting-edge topics. I think I can do that from my experience as Surgeon General of the United States, as well as from my experiences as a global citizen and having worked in many different professions, both on the business side and science side, and the medical and health side, culminating in being the United States Surgeon General.

My goal today will be to frame the status of the United States and global health that is defining the phenomenal growth of the spa industry and also fueling the demand for a transformed health system in the United States – and how these global national health metrics relate to the future of the spa industry. What role will or can the spa industry play in the new millennium both commercially and in expressing social responsibility via philanthropic endeavors, as well as providing credible opinion leaders?

As United States Surgeon General, my job was to protect, promote and advance the health, safety and security of the United States and sometimes the world, a deceptively simple job on paper, an extraordinarily difficult job when attempting to execute that in a dysfunctional highly partisan, political environment. Many of the issues that seem like straightforward health issues to you become the most contentious issues in a political battlefield. Everything from abortion to stem cells to appropriate methods of delivering health services and public health preparedness become topics on which the various political parties will have partisan views and stake their careers. So it makes it a very difficult job and, of course, all political parties want the Surgeon General to be their best friend because in our federal government there is probably no more credible position in science and health than the Surgeon General.

I say that because most polls show that the most visible and credible person in the federal government is the Surgeon General. When you think about political appointees and elected political officials speaking, generally no matter what they say, half the country is against them just because of our party structure. But when the Surgeon General of the United States speaks on the matter of health, safety and security of the nation, in the 200+ history of the Surgeon General, no one has every questioned the authority, the authenticity or the veracity of what the Surgeon General was saying.

A perfect example would be the secondhand smoke report my team and I put out in 2006. It had global ramifications and may in fact be one of the most important reports I, or any of my colleagues, have ever released because it has the potential for significantly reducing disease and economic burden not only in the United States but globally. On a relatively small budget with a small staff, the Surgeon General of the United States manages to change the health not only of the nation but the world on critical issues as they arise.

Today, we live in an apparently shrinking planet, where 6.7 billion of us are trying to survive amidst an increasing carbon footprint, a growing disease and economic burden, and in the United States within a siloed, allopathically-driven “sick care system.” That’s not an error in my speech. *It is* a sick care system. Don’t fool yourself -- ours is not a health care system. Our system is driven by perverse incentives. We reward our providers to wait until we get sick; we pay them well to make us better; and then episodically, patients keep coming back because no matter what the problem is, what ultimately happens is that people revert back to the behaviors

that caused their problems – excessive drinking, smoking, sedentary lifestyle, eating too much, eating the wrong foods, safety issues – not wearing a helmet, not wearing a seatbelt – and so on.

As Surgeon General of the United States, I realized early on that much of what we were chasing were problems caused by our aberrant behaviors and poor choices – things that all of you know very well in your practices and in operating spas. We're in a world where many citizens take little responsibility for their own health but expect the best care immediately at little or no cost. We live in a world where today 1.6 billion people live on less than one dollar a day, where clean water, sanitation and basic nutrition are sometimes luxuries in those populations globally. And irrespective of where you are globally, or where the populations are that you serve, the best business case results from passionately pursuing optimal health and wellness through prevention strategies via many of the programs and policies that all of you operate within your spas.

As United States Surgeon General, my portfolio was diverse but there was not one national or global challenge I faced that was not inextricably tied to the health and wellness of individuals or populations. I sometimes got very frustrated. At times I felt very much like a cemetery caretaker, that is, there were a lot of people below me but nobody was listening!

The Surgeon General's portfolio is largely left to the Surgeon General after discussions with Congress, the President, the executive branch and so on. But it was clear to me when I got to office that many of my own experiences as a poor kid growing up just a few miles north of here in Harlem, in an immigrant family who spoke English as a second language, homeless at 6 years old, and having to hope to get care from a health care system that was already overtaxed, were invaluable experiences when I went to Washington to serve as your United States Surgeon General. My background helped me understand the complexities of this diverse population that we have in our nation and the world and how health is inextricably tied to socio-economic status in any given individual, any given population. That is what drove the portfolio that I needed to put together to improve the health, safety and security of the nation as well as sometimes the globe in working with our allies.

As I look at my life experiences, my travels, the many professions that I've had – having been a soldier, having been in combat, having been a paramedic, a registered nurse, a physician's assistant, and slowly working my way up that academic food chain and ultimately getting into medical school – all these experiences have been critical to any success I've had. I trained initially as a surgeon, did general vascular surgery and was a trauma surgeon specialized in

trauma burns and critical care. I started to realize though that most of what I cared for was preventable. Every single day, two or three out of every four patients I admitted to the emergency room or the trauma center were because of preventable issues. They were people who led sedentary lives, engaged in high risk activities, ate poorly, didn't exercise – the list is endless. These are the variables that you all know and that ultimately are contributing to the huge disease and economic burden that this nation has. And in fact, the general overview I'm going to give you of the United States really reflects these issues globally as well.

Yes, the numbers change but the issues are very similar. As the rest of the world becomes "Americanized" and adopts "Westernized" habits, diet, and sedentary lifestyle, we start to see these same changes globally. Ultimately, I think, the spa industry can have a very big role in changing the health of not only our nation but the health of the world, because let's face it, the challenges before us do not respect our geopolitical borders. Whether it's obesity or cardiovascular disease, whether it's terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, SARS, Avian flu or any other challenge of emerging infections, geopolitical borders are immaterial in the world we're in today. In fact, often the geopolitical borders that we have set are sometimes barriers to improving the health, the safety and security of our nation as well as many other nations in the world.

Today, the United States spends more by far on health care than any nation in the world. Nobody is even close. Yet, when you look at the health metrics of the United States – life expectancy, maternal child mortality, and vaccination rates, to name a few variables – we generally rank between about 25th and 40th in the world. That's a disconnect. We obviously aren't spending our money effectively and efficiently when we have that much disease burden, that much economic burden, 50 million people without insurance, and an increasing disease and economic burden.

So as I formulated my portfolio, the first thing that I knew had to be in it was prevention. We are a nation and a world that has a disease burden that is largely preventable. In the United States, we spend over 16 percent of our gross national product on healthcare. That's \$2.1 trillion a year. With the trajectory that we're on today, if we don't break that cycle, within the decade we'll be spending over \$4 trillion, over 20 percent of our gross national product, and the legacy we'll leave our children is unsustainable. Today, we are struggling to provide care. What will it

be like tomorrow? What will it be like in the next decades when a lot of our income, if not most of it, will be directed toward healthcare? This is a non-sustainable proposition.

When we look at some of the issues that contribute to this high cost of care as well as the increasing disease and economic burden, there are a couple of examples that stand out. Smoking is number one. As the Surgeon General of the United States, I published the 27th and 28th Surgeon General reports about smoking. My colleague Luther Terry published the first Surgeon General's report on smoking in 1964. Nearly a half century later, we have almost a half million people a year dying of tobacco-related causes and millions more are suffering from cardiovascular disease, cancers and other diseases related to tobacco. Cigarettes remain the number one product legally available in our country and the world that when used as directed will kill you. We continue to sell them, but we tell the Surgeon General to "keep people healthy." It doesn't make sense.

Our agriculture policies and our food policies also contribute to the challenges we have in the nation and the world today. Another challenge is the obesity epidemic. Two out of three Americans in the United States as well as 9 million of our children are overweight or obese. All of that is preventable. In the United States, we are now seeing children in large numbers with Type 2 diabetes. We are also seeing children who have high blood pressure in grammar school. Middle age diseases are being ratcheted down into childhood. Now we see that's a big problem in itself but it's an even a bigger problem when you look at workforce diversity in the future or when you consider where our healthy, physically fit people will come from. Who will be our policemen, our firemen, our soldiers, our sailors, construction workers? Where will they come from if the generation we're raising is going to be more infirm, unfit and burdened with obesity and unprecedented disease?

My CDC epidemiologists told me, "Surgeon General, we have concerns. This could be the first generation of children in the nation's history that lives fewer years than their parents if we don't do something about this problem." Because obesity not only causes diabetes, which is a big enough problem, but it also increases the risk of cancer, increases the risk of cardiovascular disease and other chronic diseases. When we look at all of these subtle changes that are happening in society, it's clear they are actually pretty big ones and ones that drive us toward making prevention a first priority.

The preparedness of a nation at war, challenged by terrorists, was equally important in the Surgeon General's portfolio. But let's not forget that preparedness in the United States and the world is inextricably tied to the health status of its citizens. If you don't have healthy soldiers and sailors and people who protect you, there is no way you can be prepared for any and all hazards that may face us as a nation. If our citizens are not healthy, they become an added burden during preparedness activities.

I also dealt with health disparities. Our nation is still divided by its health metrics, as is the world. Dr. Martin Luther King said decades ago that the ugly twin racial discrimination is health discrimination, and we still see it throughout the world. In this country, if you are Hispanic, Native American, African American, or are poor, you will die sooner, you will have more disease, you will have less access to care and you will cost society more. That's health disparities, and it's something we all have to worry about, even in the spa industry because the cost of those that are health disparate gets transferred to all of us. It's cost shifting. The government isn't *giving* you anything through Medicare and Medicaid. They are just basically reinvesting your taxes into populations that need that care, largely populations that have a very high, preventable disease burden.

To be successful with prevention, preparedness, health disparities you need to have a currency and that is health literacy. How do we take the best science the world has ever known, conceptualize it, package it, and deliver it in a culturally competent manner to thousands of diverse populations we have the privilege to serve, to do one thing only: change people's behavior. That isn't a lot different than what you do in your spas. How do you get people on a path of optimal health and wellness? That's the toughest part because of the cultural barriers, not just language. Especially in the United States where we're a true melting pot, it is extraordinarily difficult to take the same science and deliver it in a thousand different ways in order to change behavior so that people can improve their health status, improve quality of life and reduce the cost of health care.

Another area that was important to the Surgeon General portfolio was global health. As Surgeon General my job was bigger than just the United States. My job was to work with allies and adversaries, recognizing that health knows no geopolitical borders and that the challenges faced by friends and foes globally are the same ones that we all face. AIDS is a perfect example. In sub-Saharan Africa, populations are being wiped out and 12 million children are orphans

because their parents have died. In this country we have AIDS as well. Looking at other infectious diseases, it is extraordinarily important that we think globally in everything that we do. We have the power to project health and science and technology not only for the benefit of improving the health of the nation and the world but to benefit a concept we call health diplomacy.

Health diplomacy is exporting what we do best so that it improves the health status of other countries and decreases the asymmetries of health, of wealth, of ideology and of theology that often drive divisiveness and sometimes can lead to war and terrorism. Recently, we have done that successfully and find that health can be a powerful tool for bringing peace and stability to a very unstable world.

In the spa industry we have the privilege and ability to immerse our guests in glorious, transformational experiences that enhance our businesses. And through return guest visits we can motivate behavioral change that potentially results in improved life expectancy, quality of life and decreased cost of care. Many of you must be wondering how a Surgeon General ended up in the spa world, even a pre-eminent one like Canyon Ranch. It's a quick story that's probably worth telling. When I was leaving office at the end of my four-year term, I had a number of wonderful opportunities nationally and globally, some in academics, some in business.

One day I got a call from a very wise man named Mel Zuckerman, who's been a friend for many years, and Jerry Cohen. I thought Mel was just being paternalistic as he always was. He would call me in Washington and give me advice and this time he asked me what I was going to do. I told him, "Oh I have all these opportunities ...". And he said, "You know, Rich, talk to me before you make any decisions." Again I thought he was just being paternalistic. But I went and spoke to him, and Enid and Jerry and they said they had an idea: "Wouldn't it be great to bring the authority, the authenticity, the knowledge base of the Surgeon General of the United States to the spa industry at Canyon Ranch to work with us and to work with others to bring health to all people, not just the ones we serve, but really a more expansive vision?" I said, "Yeah, Mel, but what would the Surgeon General do at a spa?" He said, "Rich, you understand who we are, you've known us for 20 years, and you own a home here. Canyon Ranch is bigger than just a spa. This is about the health of the nation, the health of the world. This is about changing the way we think. You know we do a lot of philanthropy. It's not just about our guests, it's about expressing social responsibility."

I told Mel I had agreed to work with the other Surgeons General on a lot of different things and that I wanted to go back to the university, too. His reply was that they had already endowed a professorship for me at the University of Arizona. I was grateful and honored but then told Mel that I was really interested in still working with the underserved populations and that the other Surgeons General -- Koop, Satcher, others – and I had made a commitment to continue to work with underserved population because we all believe that “once a Surgeon General, always a Surgeon General.”

Mel and Jerry said, “We figured you’d say that, Rich, and we’ve already set up the non-profit Canyon Ranch Institute, which is our 501(c)3. Besides being the vice chairman of our corporation, we’d like you to be the president of the Institute and in that Institute you can express social responsibility any way you want. All we ask is you take our best Canyon Ranch practices and give them to all underserved populations that can benefit from improved health and wellness.” I said, “Yeah, Mel, but ...” and he interrupted me. “Rich,” he said, “don’t you understand? I’m offering you the opportunity to come to Canyon Ranch, be at the University, still continue to work as Surgeon General, but unlike the federal government, we will pay you well and respect you!”

Being at Canyon Ranch has been a wonderful transition for me because I have the latitude to still work globally and work with many other organizations including some of yours in the spa industry. I can express myself commercially on the business side for Canyon Ranch but also on the socially responsible side through our philanthropies and through our Canyon Ranch Institute, which is serving many communities around the United States. In fact, one is right up here in the South Bronx, in a federally qualified community health center with 26,000 of the poorest people in the United States, most of them Hispanic immigrants. We are working with the health center to put in a Life Enhancement Program and improve the health of that community. We have models like this that are springing up all around the country with our partners and it’s a wonderful opportunity to take the best practices that we have and really change the world and make it a healthier place. We take these best practices to those who need it most.

As Surgeon General, it was clear to me that the best innovation and entrepreneurial practices emulate not from government, but rather from you, the private sector. My greatest successes on behalf of the American people and sometimes the globe were based on public,

private partnerships, with passionate and knowledgeable socially responsible leaders like all of you who are not politically encumbered and who could make things happen in a timely fashion. In all of you I see the “power of possibility” to transform our nation and world through your best practices at all levels of society – to engender a national and global cultural transformation from a sick care system, to that of embracing health and wellness via a compassionate, holistic integrated approach that emphasizes the best scientifically-vetted practices of mind, body and spirit as we do at Canyon Ranch.

I formulated a little scientific committee at Canyon Ranch where we are fortunate to have doctors and scientists on our staff. Every month we look at emerging science. Our doctors, our kinesiologists, our physiologists and other professionals have been charged to find the best science in the world, grab it, and together figure out how to conceptualize it, make it into some product that we can put into the commercial side to benefit our guests, generate revenue and possibly use via our Canyon Ranch Institute. Brain fitness, energy medicine and sleep medicine are some of the emerging areas that we’re working on. It’s an ongoing process, but we never get complacent because on the commercial side we have to continue to feed the business with innovation so it serves our clients who will come and want exposure to new modalities to improve their health. We’re also using this emerging science to improve the health of populations that otherwise could not come to Canyon Ranch.

Through our best business practices, our intellectual property, philanthropy and our spa industry full of credible opinion leaders, we can drive and shape health policy and practice, nationally and globally. I challenge you and your individual companies and the collective industry with its growing infrastructure, such as this Summit. Your business successes, if collectively leveraged for the maximal public good commercially and philanthropically, have the potential to incrementally improve the health and wellness of the nation and a globe that is in desperate need of your leadership. I would strongly encourage you all in the industry to develop a global health and wellness policy platform that will allow us to speak as one and in doing so, be able to move policy and practice and our nation and the world on a desirable and much needed path toward optimal health and wellness through your best practices.

Thank you very much.