

January 17, 2013

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

This past Tuesday I had the privilege and pleasure of attending a most unusual and inspiring event—the Second Annual Clinton Foundation Health Matters Conference. (<http://www.clintonfoundation.org/main/our-work/by-initiative/clinton-health-matters-initiative/programs/health-matters-conference.html>). Former President Bill Clinton and an eclectic mix of well-known figures shared their thoughts on how we might impact health and well-being. Here are some of those ideas:

- President Clinton stressed the importance of health to the well-being of our nation. The positive economic impact of a healthier, more efficient and effective healthcare system is probably the single most important change we can make to improve the quality of life for individuals and our nation.
- Dr. Don Berwick, former President and CEO of the Institute for Healthcare Improvement and former Administrator for the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid, stressed the need to replicate the successful healthcare initiatives we have had across the country. He was one of many who noted that our environment is responsible for 40% of illness, and heredity responsible for 50%. Only 10% of illness is affected by what we as care givers can do.
- Michael McCallister, Humana Chairman, emphasized the importance of sharing health-related data to improve wellness. Understanding metrics such as calorie counts, exercise benefits, and the importance of prevention can move individuals, communities and our whole country in the right direction. Just walking 30 minutes a day is among our most powerful “medicines.”
- Dr. Deepak Chopra explained that our body is a “*verb*,” not a noun. Our body constantly evolves and can be stimulated positively by managing stress, exercising, meditating, correct eating, sleeping appropriately, and connecting with positive thinkers. Dr. Chopra said whom you associate with can make you happy and help you live longer.
- Singer-actress Barbra Streisand shared her passion as a philanthropic advocate of education and research concerning women’s heart disease. She stated that while Americans spend \$7 billion on potato chips and \$77 billion on carbonated drinks, we spend a fraction of that amount on research to prevent and cure heart disease.
- President Clinton’s daughter, Chelsea, chaired an engaging panel on healthy lifestyles. Panelists Dr. Dean Ornish, Founder and President of the Preventive Medicine Research Institute, and Dr. David Satcher, former U.S. Surgeon General, discussed how healthy lifestyles have a bigger impact on health than organized medicine. An environment which encourages exercise, healthy diet, and manages stress, coupled with prevention, is the most important controllable factor for good health in individuals and communities.
- Dan Buettner, Founder of Blue Zones, overviewed the world’s nine communities with the highest number of people who live to be more than 100-years-old. Most are engaged, always moving, have purpose, and eat nuts and beans. He maintains that the two most dangerous years of life are the first and the year that one retires.
- Connecticut’s new U.S. Senator Christopher Murphy talked about the tragedy in Newtown and how mental health is overlooked by our system with factors such as inadequate capacity, social stigma, and insufficient resources. New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly discussed the overlap of mental illness and addiction, and how prescription drug addiction is growing at epidemic rates.

President Clinton summarized the fascinating proceedings by saying it would take everyone being positive to turn things around, but added, “*In five years we will look back and be stunned by how well we have done.*” I couldn’t agree more.

Respectfully,



Allen S. Weiss, M.D., President and CEO

P.S. Feel free to share *Straight Talk* and ask anyone to email me at allen.weiss@nchmd.org to be added.