

Title V, Social Security Act:

Honoring Our Past, Celebrating Our Future

October 20, 2010, Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, D.C.

Lunch Session

PETER C. VAN DYCK: Good afternoon, everybody. The partnership and collaboration level I can tell is very high. We have a special guest as a luncheon speaker today. It gives me great pleasure to introduce Dr. Howard Koh, the 14th Assistant Secretary for Health for the US Department of Health and Human Services, after being nominated by President Barack Obama and confirmed by the US Senate in 2009. As the Assistant Secretary for Health, Dr. Koh oversees the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health, the commissioned corps of the U.S. Public Health Service, and the Office of the Surgeon General. He also serves as senior public health advisor to the Secretary. At the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health he leads an array of interdisciplinary programs related to disease prevention, health promotion, the reduction of health disparities, women and minority health and many others. In these various roles he's dedicated to the mission of creating better public health systems for prevention so that all people can reach their highest attainable standard of health. He previously served as Harvey Fineberg professor of the practice of public health, associate dean for public health practice, and director of the Division of Public Health practice at Harvard School of Public Health. He served as commissioner for public health for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from 1997 to 2003 after being appointed by Governor William Weld. He's received and earned numerous awards and honors for interdisciplinary accomplishments in medicine and public health including the Distinguished Service Award from the American Cancer Society, and many others. But I'm sure one of his favorites was, quote, "in recognition of his national contributions to the field of early detection and prevention of melanoma." The Boston Red Sox designated him a medical all-star in 2003 – listen to this – which included the ceremonial first pitch at Fenway Park. I've been in many meetings with him and know him to be a great friend of the MCH population. He's also just published in the last couple months an editorial in the American Journal of Public Health on health equity and public health leadership, one of the themes of this meeting, as you well

know. Where he said, quote, “Glaring inequities continue to riddle the public health landscape. Achieving true health equity will only come through leadership that embraces the powerful integration of science, practice and policy to create lasting change.” Welcome. [Applause]

HOWARD KOH: Thank you so much, Dr. van Dyck for that warm and flattering introduction. I wish my parents would have been here to hear it. My dad would have been very proud of me and my mom would have believed it. I have to start by saying that in my tenure as the Assistant Secretary for Healthy can't think of a more dedicated public servant than Dr. Peter van Dyck and I think he deserves another round of applause. [Applause] And I am very deeply humbled to see this incredible crowd and to celebrate with you today an extraordinary event that really honors public health history, your achievements, your perseverance, your passion and fundamentally your leadership that is really leaving a legacy for this country. It is my great privilege to send you greetings from the department, from the secretary and from all my colleagues at HHS. I also want to say that you have, in Dr. Mary Wakefield, one of the most extraordinary leaders in Federal government. It is a pleasure to see her energy in action every day. [Applause] And when I look at your agenda for today I just see the names of so many leaders and then I think of so many people who have inspired me in Maternal and Child Health, who have taught me the basics of public health through the lens of MCH. So just to mention a few, Jennifer, Jim Roosevelt, milk, Maxine Hayes, Tanya Lee Lewis, Dr. Mike Frazier always has a smile on his face. Don Berwick, a wonderful friend from Boston and Harvard, a great visionary and I know you'll love working with him in his new post. We, of course, honor the memory of Maribeth -- [Applause] I did have the pleasure of seeing her in some group meetings at HHS and I know she leaves a legacy as well. My thanks really extends to all of you here as we have former and current Federal, state and local MCH leaders, state Title V directors, family representatives, advocates for children with special healthcare needs. Professional organizations, leaders and you all have contributed to this extraordinary legacy of sustainability over 75 years. The longest standing public health program in U.S. history. That is really extraordinary and congratulations and thank you. [Applause] I have now been in public health and clinical medicine my whole career and I often ponder the issue of sustainability. How do we make things last year in and year out? Decade in and decade out? No one has done it like you. For 75 years and counting. And I know that you know that this work is sometimes frustrating but always fascinating. Sometimes exhausting but always exhilarating, never easy, but always important. And what I've loved about meeting colleagues like yourself from the MCH world in my various roles as a clinician, physician, professor, researcher, health commissioner and now as the Assistant Secretary for Health is that MCH colleagues have that special passion. I just absolutely love it because you are so dedicated to this mission and cause and you exemplify in many ways, in my view, the tremendous passion of public health professionals. Many of

you I know feel called to be in this field. It is not a choice. Something has seeped into your soul and it won't let go and so you hang in there through adversity, through challenges year in and year out so that we can reach days like today celebrating sustainability, progress and real advancements in health for some 30 million children, 4 million infants, 2 million kids with special healthcare needs, 2 1/2 million pregnant women in a year. This is an incredible track record and everybody here has contributed. And you have contributed because you have that passion, you have that understanding that our good health is a gift. It's a gift that needs to be protected every day and protecting that gift of health is the essence of our mission and what we do in public health. Or as someone once said, yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, today is a gift. That's why they call it the present. Don't you love that? And when I think of the accomplishments of Title V over 75 years, reductions in infant and maternal mortality although we still have a long way to go, improvement in childhood immunization rates, although we still have a ways to go, tremendous improvements in Perinatal care, prenatal care and newborn screening, although we have a ways to go, reauthorization of the CHIP program. Great progress in this administration particularly, I'm very proud to report that. That all happened because of your leadership, your commitment to mission and the fact that you would not let go and you want to do more. Every day you get up and you want to do more. But this is not easy work. You understand the importance now of building better systems, especially in the era of health reform. We'll be saying a little more about that. You understand passionately the power of prevention, and that is a passion for me as the Assistant Secretary for Health. So I am so grateful to you that you have built these wonderful themes of public health systems and prevention into MCH programs throughout the country. This is not easy work. It has been said that an ounce of prevention is a ton of work. [Laughter] And we have many challenges ahead. Still too many challenges ahead. We and you have gotten to where we are today because you've been flexible and you have adjusted, and as the good book says, blessed are the flexible so that ye shall not be bent out of shape. [Laughter] This is a good audience. It makes me so grateful when I stand in front of groups like this because I started my journey in health as a classic physician. One who was trained to focus in on individual biology of disease and one who 30 years ago when I started, I can't believe that, was intent on seeing patient after patient trying to master biology of disease and trying to cure each human being put in front of me. That was my mission and goal several decades ago if you had met me. I've gone on to care for patients for over 30 years. It was a great, great honor, a great sacred journey, if I can say. It taught me humility and wonder and astonishment viewing the mysteries of sickness and death from the point of view of a physician and provider. But it also left me a bit of a yearning for a broader way to make an impact and that's how I got to meet many of you. And a major learning point for me was when I became commissioner of public health in 1997 and then served in that post from 1997 to 2003, multiple governors, by the way. And I had the great pleasure of meeting many of you in the MCH community and

I want to point out my two dear friends, Debbie Walker and Sally Fogerty who I'm sure are here somewhere. [Applause] I really want to thank Debbie and Sally in particular. They opened the MCH world for me. When I started in as a state health commissioner, they came to me and taught me what this world was all about. It was about understanding the gift of health that occurs from the first day of life. It was about building better systems of care and particularly prevention. It was an extraordinary experience, by the way, to encounter the challenges of newborn screening as a new state health commissioner in my second week and the way I got to be introduced was being sued by those who thought that there should not be a public function but taken over by a private company, fortunately we won that suit. It took a couple years. But I got to think about screening that occurred literally at birth. It also made me wonder about prevention at birth through efforts like hepatitis B vaccinations. Also through the efforts of Debbie and Sally and other MCH colleagues who came and caught me, I started thinking more about the whole journey of health from birth to death or even before birth to after death and how we need public health through every stage of life throughout the Life Course. And that was very relevant to me as I became a dad of three kids and lived this with my own children, and was eager to help all of them be as healthy as possible. So now I have the great honor of being the Assistant Secretary for Health or they call me the ASH, by the way, a very acronym-driven government. Given all the years I spent in tobacco control, to be called the ASH, I find just a bit ironic. [Laughter] But as the ASH I'm delighted to join you, my colleagues at HRSA and Mary Wakefield, all our state and local leaders, to keep promoting concepts of systems of care, quality of care and prevention. As the ASH I'm also absolutely honored to help unveil in a couple months the next iteration of healthy people 2020 for which we need to have a new vision, 20/20 vision. [Laughter] Like I said, this is a great audience. And you will be pleased to know that we have four overarching goals for helping people 2020. The first are carried over from Healthy People 2010. To eliminate health disparities and promote health equity. Thank you for promoting those themes through MCH. Two more overarching goals are going to be added. To promote quality of life, healthy development and healthy behaviors across the life stages. A very important theme that you've put forward. I'm very proud of the MCH Bureau of Dr. van Dyck and many others who have distributed this very important paper on the integration of Life Course, social determinants and health equity models in Maternal and Child Health. That's the future of medicine and public health. And the fourth overarching goal is to create social and physical environments that promote good health for all. Again, the social determinants approach. Thank you. [Applause] So we really need to make the social determinants approach come alive. What that means for the country is, in short, health is too important to be left to the health sector alone. We need all our colleagues to* throughout government and throughout society to join in these efforts because there are so many other forces impacting on our health and our kids' health in addition to individual biology of the disease. In fact, there is a great line from healthy people that I

absolutely love and I read it just about every speech I give and the line reads, quote, the health of the individual is almost inseparable from the health of the larger community and the health of every community determines the overall health status of the nation, unquote. I love that line because it means that fundamentally we're all interdependent, we are all interconnected and we have promises to keep. In fact, that's the message of MCH and that's the message of public health, isn't it? We are all interdependent, we are all interconnected and we have promises to keep. Dr. van Dyck educated me just now informing me that for your performance measures that you're tracking at the state level, many of them are based on healthy people targets and goals. I'm delighted to hear that as the ASH, that means we can continue be aligned in our work as we move to make our healthier -- as we move to make our country healthier over the next decade and beyond. Now, of course, all of you have heard so much about the Affordable Care Act and this is an incredible time in our public health history. It's a transformative time. We also understand that 2014 is a major watershed because that's when insurance exchanges will be established in every state. Where Medicaid expansions will occur and we'll have dramatic increases in coverage of people who up until now have been excluded. And between now and then there have been multiple bridge programs established to get us to 2014 and that new chapter in public health history. Many of these themes, of course, affect our kids. We are very proud in the exchanges of the CHIP program. We're very, very proud that insurance companies can no longer discriminate against kids with pre-existing conditions. [Applause] We are very proud that we are increasing our workforce dramatically through the Affordable Care Act and much of that will impact on the health of children. We are very proud that the leadership of Mary Wakefield and HRSA, we're dramatically expanding community health centers to serve underserved peoples. We are very proud to have an increased emphasis on quality with many contributions from this community and Dr. van Dyck again was explaining how your emphasis on better data and almost real-time data you collect it so quickly and share it so readily can improve measurement and reporting and quality improvement cycles and really make public health quality a real concept in this day and age. And then as one who, like you, is passionate about prevention, I'm absolutely delighted that with the Affordable Care Act we have a heightened emphasis on true systems for prevention. Just two weeks ago in the "New England Journal of Medicine" the secretary and I had the great pleasure of publishing a piece entitled promoting prevention through the Affordable Care Act. I hope you've all seen it. Took a long time to work on that piece, especially that table, boy. But I was delighted to see, as we worked on this, how much of the act impacts on prevention, impacts on kids, impacts on public health. So, for example, you know that new plans established after September 23rd will have to cover preventive services put forward by U.S. preventive services task force, by Bright Futures guidelines. The cover preventive services without cost sharing so it removes cost as a barrier. Thank you very much. [Applause] And we are thrilled that preventive provisions are also built into

public programs through Medicaid, through wellness visits and Medicare and I know Dr. Berwick will be talking more about those themes because he's absolutely committed to prevention and population health as well. And then we all have a chance now to deal with other major issues that give to our kids and don't let go. Two examples, of course, are tobacco and childhood obesity. In many ways my career in public health started because I was trying to help patients overcome tobacco-related illness, and I can tell you that it is a source of tremendous anguish to care for patients who die and suffer preventable deaths and preventable suffering. When you see it just once as a physician or clinician you say to yourself there has to be a better way than this. In fact, when I challenge my students in public health classes to define public health or public health moment, whenever you say to yourself, there has got to be a better way than this, that's public health. That's a public health moment. That frustration drove me into this arena to learn and grow from you and now we have great opportunities to really make prevention a reality for kids, particularly in arenas like tobacco and obesity. For tobacco you know on June 22, 2009, the president signed into law the historic act that gives the Food and Drug Administration new authority to regulate tobacco to protect our kids for the next generation. That day was a very special day for me personally because it was my first day on the job as the ASH. On the very first day, June 22nd, I was told to report to the Rose Garden and join the crowd of 200 jubilant public health advocates who were supporting the President as he signed that act into law and I must confess to you, my closest friends, my 1200 closest friends, that when I was sitting there in that blistering heat I said, this is not an accident, this is the first thing that I'm asked to do in my official capacity in Federal public service. This is somehow destiny for me and I really feel that very passionately. And am so grateful that I have been called like you have into this arena. So very shortly you'll be hearing much more about tobacco control for our country. We're going to be unveiling some plans coordinated by the department and by advocacy groups very, very soon talking more about protecting kids from tobacco. Protecting pregnant moms from tobacco addiction and helping pregnant smokers to get off, particularly those on Medicaid with new provisions from the Affordable Care Act and then you also know that with respect to childhood obesity we have the great honor of having the leadership of the first lady in the let's move campaign. We have funding for demonstration projects. We have opportunities for funding through new community transformation grants, through a new public health and prevention fund. So these are all transformative opportunities through the Affordable Care Act and I want to thank many of you because in this time where there is not enough good information about what this act entails, if we can simply send the message that this is an act that builds better systems of care, really promotes prevent and quality and makes health a reality for our kids, that's a great message to send forth. So as I close, let me comment a little bit about the theme that Dr. van Dyck mentioned, and that is leadership. What has been so extraordinary during the journey for me is to meet many of you and to see the leadership that gushes forth from all of you in so many

extraordinary ways. And over recent years I've become a student of leadership, if I can say. I'm hungry to read the literature. A lot of it is in the business world or in the military world and not very much in the public health world, which is why I've enjoyed trying to write a little bit about it and I was delighted that Dr. van Dyck quoted from one of my articles on public health and leadership. I didn't even pay him to do that. Thank you, Peter. Have you ever stopped to think about what is leadership in public health? How do you define it and exemplify it and how do you inspire others? What are the elements of leadership? Can you define leadership in one line? I know that the definition from the late president Harry Truman was that leadership is getting other people to do what they don't want to do and like it. I'm not sure if you like that definition. I like the definition from Benjamin Zander, a British composer and maestro. He said that the job of a leader is to speak to the possibility. The MCH community has certainly done that in the last 75 years. Others say that leadership is mobilizing people to want to reach for shared aspirations. That's what you and your colleagues have done for the last 75 years plus putting forward this vision of a healthier country and healthier children and healthier moms. And we're in a time now where our environment is getting even more complex and this is truly ambiguous and interdisciplinary world. In my view, what we need is more public health leaders like you. Leaders who have been willing to step into the fray even though you may not know what the solution is, but just willing to say I care about this and I want to make a difference. You are not daunted by the fact that this is an ambiguous and interdisciplinary world, in fact, you embrace that. And then the traditional leader has been thought of as a fiercely independent person, but you know more wisely that leadership in the public health realm is cultivating interdependence. Fierce interdependence of non-traditional partners. That's how you promote the social determinants approach and health in all policies. You also know that in this very complex time that you have to be the best communicators you can possibly be. And be as succinct and as concise and as humorous as you possibly can. And then in the end, if you are an effective leader, what you have done is you have sent a message of community and you have revitalized and renewed a sense of community for everyone you touch, for everyone you see and particularly those that you do not see. In my view, that's what the MCH community has done for the last 75 years. That's why you have generated sustainability, that's why you have shown extraordinary public health leadership, and I want to thank you. So as I close, let me mention a wonderful quote from Maya Angelou. She once said, "To survive is important; but to thrive is elegant." That's what you've done with all these moms and all these kids and then finally, it has been said that we all share some common passions on this earth, to live, to love, to learn and to leave a legacy. And through your dedication through Title V and MCH you have definitely done that for generations to come. So thank you very very much. Thank you. [Applause]

