Former Surgeon General Focuses on Disparities

Dr. Richard H. Carmona, who served as U.S. Surgeon General from 2002-2006, is invited to speak at WSU's 8th Annual Diversity Conference.

"We're excited to bring in Dr. Carmona, who is a perfect fit for this conference," said Forrest Crawford, assistant to the president for institutional diversity. "Much of his work as Surgeon General focused on eliminating disparities in health care."

In fact, that topic was No. 2—after disease prevention—on Carmona's list of public health priorities during his term, which ended in July. The following text is excerpted from his column "Prevention, Health Disparities Top Focus," in the January 2004 issue of U.S. Medicine:

From birth through adulthood and into the golden years we need to work to reduce the health gap and provide information and services to minority communities. I was a "health disparity" before that term was commonly used. Growing up in Harlem we knew what it was like to have a toothache but not be able to afford to see a dentist, or to be sick but not be able to see a doctor. What happens in these communities is that kids miss more school and adults miss more work, unfortunately contributing to the continuing cycle of poverty, and adding to their challenges.

Today we are, in fact, meeting many of those challenges. ... Every day, we are finding better ways to fight disease and untimely death. This is good news for America. And we must ensure that every American has access to these great medical advances. We must ensure that every American can get medical care and treatment. In too many areas, our nation is still two nations, divided when it comes to health.

Simply put: America suffers from racial and ethnic disparities in health. To put a new twist on something that a great man—Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—once said: The inseparable twin of racial injustice is health injustice.
WSU 8th Annual Diversity Conference
October 5-6, 2006

Thursday, October 5
Weber State University Davis
6 p.m. Opening Reception

Friday, October 6
Ogden Campus: Shepherd Union Building, Val A. Browning Center and Jack D. Lampros Hall

9 a.m. Speaker: Michael Bird

10 a.m. Concurrent Panel Sessions
- Student Panel
- Counseling & Psychological Services
- E-Forum on Community Health Concerns: An Open Discussion
- Personal Beliefs & Healthcare Provisions: Ethics & Care

11:15 a.m. Concurrent Panel Sessions
- Community Partners Panel
- Communicating With Your Physician
- Student Health Services
- Complementary & Alternative Medicine
- Minority Health Care & Health Care Reform

12:30 p.m. Keynote Address: Dr. Richard H. Carmona

1:30 p.m. Reception

9 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Public Health Information Booths
- Wellness Center & HRHP
- Drug & Alcohol Abuse
- Cholesterol, Blood Pressure & Blood Sugar
- Women’s & Men’s Health Issues
- HIV/AIDS Education
- Mental Health Services
- Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP)

WEB ADDRESSES
The Diversity Center:
www.weber.edu/Diversity
Services for Students with Disabilities:
www.weber.edu/ssd
Services for International Students:
www.weber.edu/sis
Services for Multicultural Students:
www.weber.edu/sms
Nontraditional Student Center:
www.weber.edu/nontrad
Services for Women Students:
www.weber.edu/sws

Talking Points: Michael Bird

For Michael Bird, the issues of public health and health care access in the U.S. come down to that classic definition of insanity: doing the same things, the same ways, but expecting different results.

In nearly three decades of experience dealing with health and social issues, including a term as the first Native American president of the American Public Health Association, Bird has seen a lot of this insanity. "If we want to make a difference, we need to do things differently," he said.

Bird, who will be speaking at WSU’s 8th Annual Diversity Conference, pointed out several issues to get people thinking ahead of the conference:

- "We need to invest in our public health infrastructure. Public health is everything a country does for the health of all its citizens—providing clean water, clean air, immunization programs, concentrating on prevention of problems. As a nation, we spend so little money on prevention."

- "The U.S. has an aging health care workforce, and as they near retirement age, we have a desperate need for professionals in the pipeline to take their place. To be the next nurses, doctors, technicians. But they’re not in the education system in the necessary numbers to replace what we’re losing. Health care is a profession that calls to people who want to help others. But we need to create incentives to support those people."

- "The number one reason people declare bankruptcy in this country is because they can’t afford to pay medical expenses. When you have this many people in a country without insurance, it’s not that a crisis is coming—we’re already in a crisis."

Michael Bird will be a featured speaker at the 8th Annual Diversity Conference. Director of Region 6 for Native Americans with ValueOptions-New Mexico, a national for-profit behavioral health company, he previously served as executive director of the National Native American AIDS Prevention Center and worked with the national Indian Health Service for 20 years.

- Jennifer Philion, University Communications
Happy To See the Dentist?

Most people don’t look forward to going to the dentist, but for some of Ogden’s low-income families, the experience can be downright terrifying—not just because of the typical “dental phobia,” but often because they worry about being able to afford dental care for themselves and their children.

Luckily, these families have an outlet for affordable, professional dental care: the Weber-Midtown Dental Clinic.

The clinic is an outreach partnership between WSU and the Midtown Community Health Center (MCHC). The health center seeks to overcome obstacles to health care access for low-income families. In 2001, MCHC began to work with WSU’s dental hygiene program to grant dental care access to the medically underserved in the community.

WSU offers the only bachelor’s degree program in dental hygiene in Utah, accepting only 30 new students each year. Students get the added bonus of working with real patients in an on-campus dental hygiene clinic, which offers services such as cleanings, x-rays and dental care education. The clinic serves not only WSU faculty, staff and students, but the surrounding community as well.

Students in the dental hygiene bachelor’s or associate’s degree programs work under the supervision of licensed dental faculty. Because the clinic serves an educational purpose, it can offer services at much lower costs than most dentists.

The Weber-Midtown Dental Clinic is an offshoot of the regular campus clinic, although the two often share referrals, translators and sometimes staff. At $25 a visit, the clinic is a godsend for families without dental insurance. As many as 60 WSU dental hygiene students provide preventive care and patient education under the supervision of MCHC’s dentists: Jared Anderton, Jim Ellis and Joe Hopkin.

“Having a dental clinic at WSU is a wonderful resource for our students, as many of the patients that are seen at the Weber-Midtown Dental Clinic are referred to our dental hygiene students,” said Gail Campbell, dental hygiene clinic manager. “The goal is to provide dental care to people who can’t afford it.”

According to Lily Gonzales, receptionist at Weber-Midtown Dental Clinic, each dentist sees 10 patients per day. Patients with no dental insurance are accepted on a sliding scale based on income and family size. At the beginning of each month, the clinic tries to see as many as 15 new patients, but Gonzales says demand has been so high that the clinic is backlogged and may not be able to see new patients for a month or two.

With public health insurance carriers and Medicare slashing dental coverage, access to oral health care is becoming increasingly difficult for many area residents. The clinic has received state and federal grants to help it operate.

“The main purpose of these grant programs is to improve the health of medically underserved Utahns,” said Dr. Marc Babitz, director of the Division of Health Systems Improvement, Utah Department of Health. “The programs do this by making primary care services more accessible to the working poor, children, elderly, Native Americans, migrant and seasonal farm-workers, individuals with chronic diseases, the homeless, and single heads of household.”

The clinic also is a member of the Health Access Team, developed by the Weber Coalition for a Healthy Community. The team’s goals include providing case management services, establishing a volunteer network of health care providers and providing health education services and peer-to-peer education programs.

Gonzales says that clients of the Weber-Midtown Dental Clinic are thankful for the service. “They wish we had more appointments available, but they are really grateful. Many of the patients we see can’t afford medical care, or their doctors ask them for a lot of money up front. They come here in pain, and we can help them.”

- Courtney Rottgering, University Communications

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Diversity Activities Continue

While the Shepherd Union Building is being renovated, the Diversity Center in Room 240 is out of commission. However, diversity activities are now being overseen by Services for MultiCultural Students, under interim director Keith Wilder. Contact the office at 801-626-7330 for information about upcoming events.
With a university student’s busy schedule, personal health care issues often are put on the back burner. Problems can get worse because they aren’t taken care of in a timely manner at an early point while they are still small.

“It’s a scary feeling to not have insurance,” said Natalie Clemens ’05, “You’re always keeping your fingers crossed that nothing bad will happen.” Clemens, who didn’t have health insurance as a college student until her senior year, waited months to get a sore foot looked at. When health benefits finally kicked in from a job, she said, “The first thing I did was go to a doctor.”

Approximately 25 percent of college students nationwide are not covered by health insurance. For these students, medical expenses become even more daunting. WSU’s Student Health Center tries to help students by offering medical services to any WSU student, insured or not. Services are funded by student fees; some require a small payment.

Physicians at the health center may not be able to treat all diseases or injuries. Center director Juliana Larsen said that while students don’t need insurance to visit the health center, it becomes an important issue if they have major illnesses or injuries that have to be treated at a hospital.

“Insurance matters when students are in the 18-25-year-old range, when they think they are invincible,” she said, “Insurance makes a difference in being able to pay for accidental injuries. Paying for an emergency room visit can be costly. If they don’t have insurance, it could be very difficult.”

While it’s impossible to predict a chance accident or an unforeseen serious illness, students can make lifestyle choices that could help them avoid serious health care costs. Students should be conscious and aware of their health, frequently evaluating their habits and how healthy they feel.

Some basic tips can help students (and others) avoid health problems:

- Eat foods containing phytochemicals. Specifically, eat dark green, yellow and red vegetables and fruits.
- Do aerobic exercise frequently. It speeds up the heart to pump larger quantities of blood. Breathing speeds up, converting oxygen from your lungs to your blood. Sweating helps prevent the body from overheating. The body’s natural virus-killing cells are increased.
- Don’t smoke. Heavy smokers get more severe colds more frequently.
- Cut alcohol consumption. Heavy alcohol use destroys the liver, the body’s primary filtering system, which means germs won’t leave the body as quickly.
- Relax. Take a set amount of time everyday to relax. This will assist the immune system’s ability to respond quicker.
- Analyze your routine. Think about the times during the day when you may be susceptible to disease. Applying hand sanitizer after using a public computer, for example, could help reduce germ exposure.

Source: WebMD

While the health center may not be able to treat all illnesses or injuries, the physicians do their best to refer patients to physicians who will meet students’ needs. If students are insured, the health center tries to refer them to physicians who will accept their insurance. Students also are referred to other community resources. The center’s staff does all it can to minimize the expense of health care.

According to Larsen, the center deals with a wide variety of health issues and operates much like a walk-in or ambulatory care clinic. The clinic serves students, and spouses of students who have a “family card,” but does not see children.

For more information and tips on how to stay free of injury and disease, see the health center’s Web site, weber.edu/healthcenter.

- Jonathan McBride, University Communications

Spotting Warning Signs

Faculty and staff members at any university should be aware of health issues among the students they teach and/or associate with. Many students are unaware of the severity of the health problems they may be facing—or even if they do understand the severity, they may not know where to get help.

It’s important to be proactive in helping students find health care when they need it. Here are some suggested steps to take in identifying and addressing student health issues:

- Recognize differences in behavior patterns. If students are missing classes, their grades are lowering, they stop participating in class discussion, they are falling asleep in classes or starting to do anything that is drastically different from their normal personality, there may be a problem.
- Ask if there is a problem. If you suspect a student is struggling, ask what is wrong or what is getting in the way of his/her schoolwork.
- Inform of student resources. Depending on what the problem is, the Student Health Center, the Counseling and Psychological Services Center or other appropriate campus services are available. Advise the student about what the university has to offer.
- Try to understand some of the additional things going on in the student’s life. Many have jobs, family and other commitments outside of school that impact their ability to perform academically.