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Insight on the News

August 6, 2001

Devil Is in the Details of Surgeon General's Sex Report.(David Satcher, controversy)(Brief Article)

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Along with his predecessor, Joycelyn Elders (the mullah of masturbation education), U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher was appointed by President Clinton. It shows, especially in his new report, A Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior (see "Teens Really Need `Best Friends,'" July 30.)

There's a telling item buried in a Washington Post story on the report's release. In compiling his manifesto, he consulted a variety of sources, the surgeon general disclosed, including those who would "qualify as commercial sex workers."

"Now, wait a minute," I said to Damon Thompson, a Satcher spokesman. "Are you telling me the surgeon general asked prostitutes how to teach our children about sex?" After checking with his boss, Thompson assured me that "commercial sex workers" would indeed include ladies of the night. The lunatics haven't just taken over the asylum; they're franchising the operation!

That was not the most incredible aspect of the report. Besides hookers, Satcher received sage advice from their colleagues at Planned Parenthood, the Alan Guttmacher Institute and the Sex Information and Education Council of the United States. Somehow, he overlooked the Penthouse Forum.

Armed with this input, Satcher concluded there is no "scientific evidence" that teaching abstinence until marriage alone is effective. Consequently, he urged schools to adopt curricula that praise self-control and pass out contraceptives.

Imagine a violence-prevention program where kids are given automatic weapons or courses promoting tolerance where students are lectured by white supremacists and Afrocentrists.

Only in the never-never land of sexual pedagogy is "wait until you're married, but here's a condom in case you have an uncontrollable

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urge in the meantime" considered anything but self-defeating.

Actually, Satcher isn't telling America's youth to wait until marriage. Any old "mutually monogamous" relationship will do. That's because our surgeon general understands that "marriage is not perfect."

So, instead of asking adolescents to exercise restraint (with a pocketful of condoms) until they say, "I do," Satcher wants them to refrain from getting hot and heavy until they achieve a "mutually monogamous" relationship.

How long is this mutuality to exist before couples hop between the sheets? How is a commitment to exclusivity to be manifested, absent vows exchanged before God and man?

Quite coincidentally, Satcher's report endorses conclusions he long has held. In 1994, when Satcher headed the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the agency ran an \$800,000 national advertising campaign aimed at America's youth. One ad helpfully advised: "Latex condoms are available in different sizes, colors and textures. Find one that's right for you." And if you have trouble making a selection, consult your friendly, neighborhood commercial sex worker. That's where the surgeon general goes for advice.

Satcher and the rest of the safe-sex crowd neglect to mention that condoms frequently fail. Leslie Unruh of the National Abstinence Clearinghouse says she attended a conference of sex educators where a speaker asked the audience if they would have sex with the man or woman of their dreams knowing that person had HIV/AIDS using only a condom for protection. In a crowd of several hundred, no one raised a hand.

We've had comprehensive sex education (erotic indoctrination, really) for more than 30 years. Children are given instruction in copulation that is comprehensive by the Kama Sutra's standards. They're warned continually of the perils of nasty microbes and unwanted pregnancy and are drilled in contraception. Still, each year, there are 1.4 million abortions and 12 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases. The out-of-wedlock birthrate is 33 percent. Since this carnal explosion parallels the triumph of sexual instruction, could cause and effect be at work here?

Streetwalkers often cruise urban areas with strip clubs and adult bookstores. Might there be a connection between stimulation and gratification? Perhaps Satcher should consult informed sources in the commercial sex industry. No self-respecting parakeet would want the bottom of his cage lined with the pages of the good doctor's report.

Don Feder writes editorials for the Boston Herald and is nationally syndicated.

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