

## Surgeon General's Report Calls for Sex Education Beyond Abstinence Courses

By DIANA JEAN SCHEMO

WASHINGTON, June 28 — In what he described as a bid to give scientific grounding to the volatile debate over sex education, the surgeon general of the United States today urged communities to provide young people with thorough and medically accurate sex education as a way to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies, rapes and sexually transmitted diseases.

The long-awaited report from Dr. David Satcher, the surgeon general, said there was insufficient research to back claims that courses teaching abstinence until marriage have any success in delaying sexual activity among unmarried teenagers. Such programs, which account for the single largest federal effort in sex education, teach that the only reliable way to avoid pregnancy and disease is to remain chaste until marriage.

With financing for the abstinence until marriage programs up for reauthorization later this year, Dr. Satcher's report drew swift criticism from conservatives.

While praising the value of teaching abstinence, Dr. Satcher said youngsters also needed instruction in human sexuality. His report found no scientific support for fears that talking about sex in the classroom led teenagers to have sex at an earlier age. But several studies showed that when students who had taken sex education did become sexually ac-

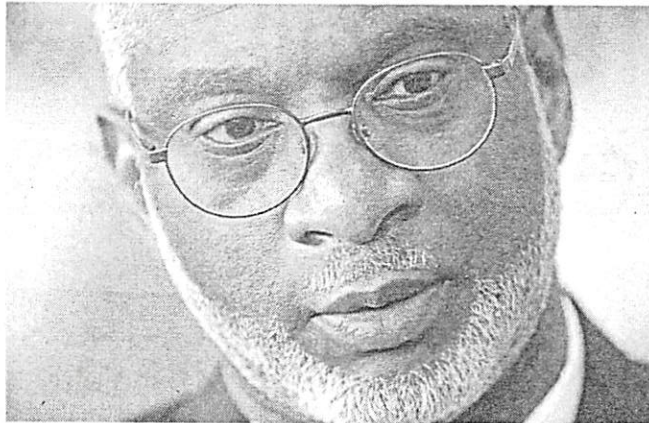
tive, they were more likely to use protection, his report said.

The surgeon general called on individuals and communities to respect diversity in sexual orientation, saying there was little evidence that sexual orientation, once discovered in adolescence, could later be altered. But he said there was proof that physical abuse, insults or isolation of young people who are gay can undermine their mental health, sometimes resulting in depression or suicide. He defined abstinence as celibacy outside of a "mutually monogamous relationship," not necessarily marriage.

"Every child needs to have equity of opportunity for sex education," Dr. Satcher said in an interview today. "That's the point we are trying to make."

Originally scheduled to be released in the fall, "The Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior" took nearly two years to prepare. The delay in its publication fueled doubts among scientists and health professionals that it would ever come out, or that it would venture a bold stance in tackling what Dr. Satcher today acknowledged was "the most controversial and sensitive" issue he has faced as surgeon general.

While acting independently, the surgeon general works out of the Department of Health and Human Services. Dr. Satcher, who was ap-



A report by the surgeon general, Dr. David Satcher, found insufficient proof that teaching teenagers abstinence delayed sexual activity.

pointed by President Bill Clinton, has released other reports in conjunction with President Bush's secretary of health and human services, Tommy G. Thompson, but he issued today's report by himself.

While Mr. Thompson had seen a copy of the report before it was issued, he made no changes to it. "It's a completely independent work," said Anthony Jewell, a spokesman for Mr. Thompson.

The White House appeared to be distancing itself from the work, al-

though not attacking it. Ari Fleischer, the White House spokesman, noted that the report was commissioned under Mr. Clinton, and said that Mr. Bush's "overall approach on these matters focuses on abstinence, abstinence education."

In his report, Dr. Satcher defined sexual health broadly, saying it was not confined to an individual's reproductive years, or to having sex, per se. "It includes the ability to understand and weigh the risks, responsibilities, outcomes and impacts of

sexual actions and to practice abstinence when appropriate," he wrote. "It includes freedom from sexual abuse and discrimination and the ability of individuals to integrate their sexuality into their lives, derive pleasure from it, and to reproduce if they so choose."

The report, based on a review of hundreds of scientific studies and journal articles, estimated that 45 million people, or one in six Americans, are infected with genital herpes, with a million new cases each year. It said that 22 percent of all women have been raped, and that 104,000 children are sexually abused each year.

While Dr. Satcher said he set out only to establish common ground for discussion in the highly polarized issue of sex education, his report appeared to please scientists and health professionals with his call for frank discussion about sexuality.

Dr. Bruce Bagley, chairman of the board of the American Academy of Family Physicians, which represents 91,000 family physicians, praised Dr. Satcher's message. "Our ability to change society one person at a time is very limited," Dr. Bagley said. "The only way we're going to change approaches to sexual behavior and sexual activity is through school. In school, not only at the doctor's office."

Advocates of abstinence programs were outraged. Peter Brandt, direc-

tor of issue response at Focus on the Family, a church-based conservative group, called the report "ideology disguised as science from the beginning to the end." He disputed the surgeon general's statement that sexual orientation could not be altered through force of will, and said the report "calls severely into question the surgeon general's ability to remain the chief medical officer of the United States." Dr. Satcher's term ends in February 2002.

But rather than appealing to either camp, Dr. Satcher's call could as easily have come from American parents. Several recent opinion polls show the vast majority of parents want schools to urge teenagers to remain virgins, but also to teach them how to protect themselves if they become sexually active.

Parents say they want teachers to discuss with teenagers the use of condoms and contraception, to tell them what to do if they are raped, and where to go for treatment if they suspect they have contracted a disease. Three out of four parents trust schools to discuss sexual orientation with their children, the opinion polls show.

Drew Altman, president of the Kaiser Family Foundation, a nonprofit research group that has done a number of surveys on sex education, said, "There is nothing in that report that isn't endorsed wholeheartedly in every survey we've done of parents."

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diversity of sexual values within any community." President Clinton appointed Dr.

Satcher as surgeon general, the nation's chief health officer. But even his administration had doubts about the document, Mr. Fleischer said.

"The previous administration made some judgments about the merits of this report and made a

decision that it was a report that they did not want to come out at a time when the previous administration, at least, was running for office," Mr. Fleischer said. "[They] must have seen something in this report that made them delay it." Infighting within the Bush admin-

istration further delayed the report. That disagreement is one reason Dr. Satcher is not expected to be reappointed after his four-year term ends in February.

Mr. Coleman has said he knew the Satcher report on sexual behavior would anger many, but it had to be done.

"It may not satisfy everybody," he told the Dallas Morning News earlier this month. "We've got to be able to bring people together and not just have this as an endorsement of one side's position on this issue."

Mr. Coleman is highly regarded in some quarters for leadership on issues of human sexuality.

"I think he's a wonderful role model of a research scientist who also sees the importance of advocacy," Debra Haffner, former head of the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States, said in an interview last year with the Minneapolis Star-Tribune.

Detractors view him differently. Tom Pritchard, of the Minneapolis-based Minnesota Family Council, said Mr. Coleman is "the vanguard of the sexual revolution, which has unleashed a wide range of destructive forces in American society."

Mr. Coleman's human sexuality program at the University of Minnesota "promoted some of the most outrageous behavior and activities," Mr. Pritchard said. He cited an event for transsexuals and transvestites that was held at a local homosexual bar.

Mr. Coleman has a doctorate in psychology and has worked on sexuality issues for more than two decades. He specializes in research on homosexuality, bisexuality and transgenderism. He has written widely on homosexuals "coming out." He is the founder and editor of the Journal of Psychology of Human Sexuality and the International Journal of Transgenderism.

Under his leadership in 1999, the World Association for Sexuality adopted an 11-point "Declaration of Sexual Rights," which asserts all people have the right to sexual freedom without coercion or discrimination based on sexual orientation, age, race, class, religion or disability.

People should have the freedom to make reproductive choices and have access to comprehensive sex education and sexual health care, the declaration says.

The WAS declaration "is sort of a manifesto of the sexual revolution—no holds barred, anything goes," Mr. Pritchard said.

New York psychotherapist and author Edward Eichel takes issue with Mr. Coleman's 1989 statement that sexual behavior "is primarily a sex act and the sex of the partner is of secondary consideration."

This viewpoint undermines support for heterosexuality, marriage and laws that prohibit sex with children, said Mr. Eichel.

Mr. Coleman's many honors include a Distinguished Scientific Achievement Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality and the Richard J. Cross Award for Sexuality Education from Robert Wood Johnson Medical School.

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## Sexologist behind report Surgeon general's adviser an authority on gay behavior

By Cheryl Wetzstein and Julia Duin  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Surgeon General David Satcher's new report on sexuality, which got a thumbs down from the White House, was drafted by an internationally known authority on homosexual and transgender practices.

Eli Coleman, a senior adviser to Dr. Satcher, directs the University of Minnesota Medical School's program on human sexuality. He also is the outgoing president of the World Association for Sexology (WAS), an organization devoted to promoting

the "scientific" study of sex worldwide.

Mr. Coleman supervised the contents of the report, which were sure to raise hackles in the Bush administration by offering a tepid appraisal of abstinence education while castigating Americans for "anti-homosexual attitudes." Those attitudes, the report says, lead to depression, suicide and lower self-acceptance among homosexuals and "transgendered" individuals.

White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer said that, as of yesterday morning, President Bush had not

read the Dr. Satcher's report, "Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior."

The report — 16 pages long, not counting notes — was released Thursday. It called on Americans to address high rates of sexually transmitted diseases, abortion, rapes, HIV infections and child sexual abuse via a "mature and thoughtful discussion about sexuality."

Dr. Satcher said such a dialogue must aim at "finding common ground" based on respect for "the

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Surgeon General David Satcher

# Study finds sex education based on abstinence to be ineffective

By RICHARD WHITMIRE  
Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON — California researchers have found an abstinence-based sex education program had no lasting effect on teen-agers' attitudes on when to first have sex.

In addition to raising questions about whether abstinence programs are as successful as traditional sex education programs, the study also is likely to prompt questions about whether the fear of AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases is a bigger deterrent to early sex.

The study by sex education researcher Douglas Kirby looked at a program called Education Now and Babies Later that involved 187,000 youths in 31 California counties.

The study showed that the program, which ended in 1994, had a relatively small effect on the attitudes of the youths in the first three months after it ended. And 17 months after the program ended, any trace that the program had affected their thinking had disappeared.

"There is currently no middle-school curriculum for which strong evidence indicates it is effective in delaying sexual involvement among young adolescents," concluded Kirby and co-authors in Family Planning Perspectives, a journal of the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a think tank de-

voted to research on sex issues.

The California program used a curriculum called PSI, or Postponing Sexual Involvement, which had been used successfully in a much-acclaimed trial in Atlanta. In Atlanta, the program postponed the age of sexual involvement among low-income black youths.

There are several differences between the Atlanta and California trials. The California program was far larger, involved youths living in different communities and offered only five one-hour sessions.

Programs that have shown success in smaller trials lasted an average of 15 sessions.

In abstinence programs, youths are given a chance to act out scenarios where they practice different methods for spurning sexual overtures.

Another important difference between the Atlanta and California programs is that the California program did not include a mandatory follow-up sex education class.

For several years, sex researchers have maintained that abstinence programs work only when coupled with some traditional sex education — a practice social conservatives find objectionable.

In many communities, school-based sex education programs that offer anything more than abstinence education are coming under fire by conser-

vatives. Those programs only encourage sexual activity, said objecting parents — a connection researchers insist doesn't exist.

Last month, there was some reason to hope the abstinence movement was taking hold after the federal government reported the first drop in teen sexual activity in more than two decades. Health experts, however, said the two most likely reasons behind the drop are worries over AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases.