

Welcome from the U.S. Public Health Service
by Dr. Robert R. Jacobson
Director
Division of National Hansen's Disease Programs and
GLW Hansen's Disease Center, Carville, LA, U.S.A.

Dr. Meyers, Professor Chen, Congress Participants and Guests:

It is a pleasure to be here today, both as a participant in the Congress and as a representative of the Public Health Service of the United States Government. On their behalf I welcome all of you to this 14th International Leprosy Congress, the first to be held in this country.

In spite of generally not being considered an endemic country for Hansen's disease, the United States has a long and interesting history of involvement with the disease. Although introduced into this continent in Colonial times, it was not until many years later that the two best known United States Hansen's Disease Centers were established at Kalaupapa on Molokai in Hawaii and at Carville in Louisiana. Next year will, in fact, mark the 100th anniversary of the establishment of Carville. In 1894 it was a state-run facility, but in 1921 as the number of nonLouisiana patients increased, it was acquired by the federal government and continues as a federal facility at present.

Although our patient population is relatively small, the United States has always had a major commitment to the care of patients and research on the disease. The best known result of this research effort was the so-called "Miracle at Carville" which occurred in 1941 with the discovery that the sulfones were effective against this disease, giving us the first really useful medication to treat it on a long-term basis. The com-

mitment to research has continued over the years with, among other things, work with the armadillo as a source of bacilli for research in general, vaccine development, lepromin production, etc. More recently, efforts to find anti-Hansen's disease drugs at Carville and San Francisco have led to clarithromycin and minocycline, both of which are very potent additions to the formulary for this disease. Hansen's disease research in this country, however, has benefited more than just that disease. Techniques developed for the rapid testing of potential new drugs at Carville have been applied to screening large numbers of compounds for antituberculosis activity and procedures developed to heal plantar ulcers in patients have proven very successful in healing similar ulcers in diabetics, thereby markedly diminishing the need for amputations in these cases. A continued commitment by the United States and other governments to control and research is, of course, vital if the international goal of elimination of leprosy as a public health problem by the year 2000 and eventually the eradication of this ancient disease is to succeed.

During the next 5 days you will be hearing about and discussing with your colleagues from around the world the present situation and the future prospects for our efforts to conquer this disease. All indications are that this is going to be a very important and productive Congress, and I wish you every success in your efforts.