



Caring Hearts

The Health of a Nation

Health Related Causes and First Ladies

Contemporary First Ladies are inspired to bring attention to matters that speak to their hearts. Each realized the privilege her name would bring to a national problem with the hope that the attention would bring about change for the better. It is no surprise that many First Ladies were concerned with health issues. Their interests stemmed from personal experience and awareness that shaped their lives as daughters, wives, career women and mothers. We are fortunate as a nation that a few of our First Ladies boldly embraced issues that were unglamorous, uncomfortable, and appeared unsolvable. Each was impassioned to tackle a health care problem before, during and after her first ladyship – and we thank them.

Lou Henry Hoover

founding member of the Women's Division of the National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF)

Lou Henry Hoover (1874-1944) was an early advocate for women's sporting activities. As a student at Stanford University, she played baseball, tennis and basketball, and she became president of the Stanford Women's Athletic Association in her senior year. This was not the norm for a young woman growing up in the late 1800s. The Victorian standard for women was limited to household duties and emphasized their roles as wives and mothers.

The early 1920s ushered in a new emphasis on physical health. This was mainly due to two national calamities: the influenza epidemic of 1918-1919 and the alarming number of American men found to be unfit for service during World War I. Lou Hoover, already a known national leader for the Girl Scouts, was involved from the conception of the National Amateur Athletic Federation (NAAF) in 1922 until her death in 1944. She advocated for a separate division for women from the start, and was elected as vice-president of the NAAF, thus becoming



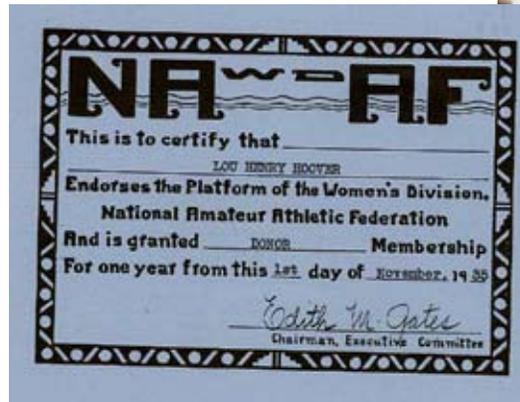
the only woman to serve on the governing board. She served as president of the Women's Division from 1923 until 1928 when she became First Lady – taking the title of honorary chairman and quietly continuing her involvement and financial support.

Although it may seem ridiculous now, there were many worries and concerns about women playing sports. There was apprehension about women becoming too “manly” in physical appearance; alarm about competing during certain times of the month; and lively discussion on the proper attire of women while participating in any type of sport. Mrs. Hoover was less interested in these types of issues and more interested in the physical and mental benefits to women involved in sports. The groundbreaking work of the NAAF established a national standard for physical fitness. The NAAF's promotion of sporting activities evolved into intramural sports programs for men and women. We can thank Lou Hoover and the NAAF that intramural sports continue to be popular across the country.

1928 Opening of what became the Women's Division of the NAAF

We have so many problems to discuss, friends, - so much we wish to accomplish, - so very little time in which to accomplish it all, that it seems to me a singularly inopportune moment for an address by a temporary chairman.

In the first place, we do not need an exhortation on the importance of the correct physical development of our girls, nor of the most satisfactory methods for guiding their athletic endeavors. We are all here because each one of us



Lou Hoover on horseback (above), an excerpt of her NAAF speech (above left) and her NAAF membership card (left)



Eleanor Roosevelt visited hospitals in the Pacific for the Red Cross. *Photo courtesy Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, Hyde Park, New York*

Eleanor Roosevelt

official representative of the Red Cross during World War II

It is hard to find a more tirelessly committed and involved woman in our country during difficult times than First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962). The nation shifted its worries about the Depression to World War II. Like most American women, Eleanor's concern was personally felt as all four of her sons, James, Elliot, Franklin Delano Jr., and John served in the armed forces. As the "eyes and legs" of her husband, Eleanor was honored to serve as the official representative of the Red Cross. She visited countless hospitals, nursing stations, recreation centers, rest and training camps throughout the Southwest Pacific in 1943, and again in the Caribbean in 1944.



As a Red Cross representative Mrs. Roosevelt traveled in official uniform and typed reports on the status of the Red Cross camps she visited. She donated half of the salary that she earned writing her My Day columns to the Red Cross; the other half went to the American Friends Service Committee. She wrote her columns on airplanes as she island-hopped, or late at night after a full day of inspections,

speeches, receptions, and one on one visits with wounded soldiers. She copied down innumerable addresses of each and every soldier's wife, sweetheart, mother and family members, and typed a personalized letter on their behalf upon her return to the states.

The tour schedule was grueling enough, but the emotional turmoil took a toll on Eleanor as well. She found the visits to the soldiers mentally affected by the war dreadfully grave. By the time she returned from the Pacific tour she had lost thirty pounds and found she was more tired than she had ever been in her life. She wrote, "The Pacific trip left a mark from which I think I shall never be free. It is because there must be thousands of men and women in this country who were similarly affected by their experiences during the war that I have hope we may eventually build the kind of future that so many men suffered and died for."

Betty Ford

founder of The Betty Ford Center

In 1964, Betty Ford (1918 -) awoke in the night with excruciating pain in her neck that shot down her left arm. Hospitalization, therapy, and traction failed to alleviate the pinched nerve. Doctors couldn't cure the problem, but they did prescribe medication. Further demands were placed upon her as the mother of four active children and the wife of a busy House of Representatives Majority Leader. The extra stress caused Mrs. Ford to justify her use of drugs and alcohol. By 1978, just shy of her sixtieth birthday, Mrs. Ford's family intervened. Fearing they would lose her to her addictions, they decided to no longer be enablers. Although Mrs. Ford denied that she was an addict, she did agree to check into the Long Beach Naval Hospital's Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation Service for treatment. Her recovery continues to this day. She bravely decided to aid her own struggle with addiction by helping others with their dependencies.

Mrs. Ford's dream to have a place where people could go to recover and educate themselves about



their addictions was set in motion with the founding of the Betty Ford Center in 1982. Today, the Center is the leading treatment facility in its field with a licensed 100-bed hospital on a twenty-acre campus. The emphasis is on each patient's physical, spiritual and psychological needs, and involves the patient's family members in the process of recovery.

Another signature of "Betty's Camp" is gender-specific treatment. Mrs. Ford knows all too well the pressures placed on women by society. She writes, "So often women...find themselves playing subservient, secondary and dependent roles. Our culture is slowly changing, but that hasn't been much help when it comes to rebuilding our fragile self-esteem and strengthening our self-image as we women attempt to recover from the disease of addiction. I'm afraid it is safe to assume that a chemically dependent woman is on the bottom rung of the ladder of self-esteem." Not only does Mrs. Ford's caring legacy continue to help women, but it benefits all people of our country in need of treatment for drug and alcohol dependency.



*Photo Courtesy Gerald R. Ford
Presidential Museum, Grand Rapids,
Michigan*

Rosalynn Carter

advocate for mental health care



Rosalynn Carter (1927 -) has been a devoted and determined advocate for mental health issues throughout her public service career. As First Lady of Georgia in the early 1970s she served on the Governor's Commission to Improve Services to the Mentally and Emotionally Handicapped. During her husband's presidential campaign she openly declared her cause to be legislative reform on mental health issues. As First Lady, she became the honorary chair of the President's Commission on Mental Health; a proud moment during her tenure was the passage of the Mental Health Systems Act of 1980.

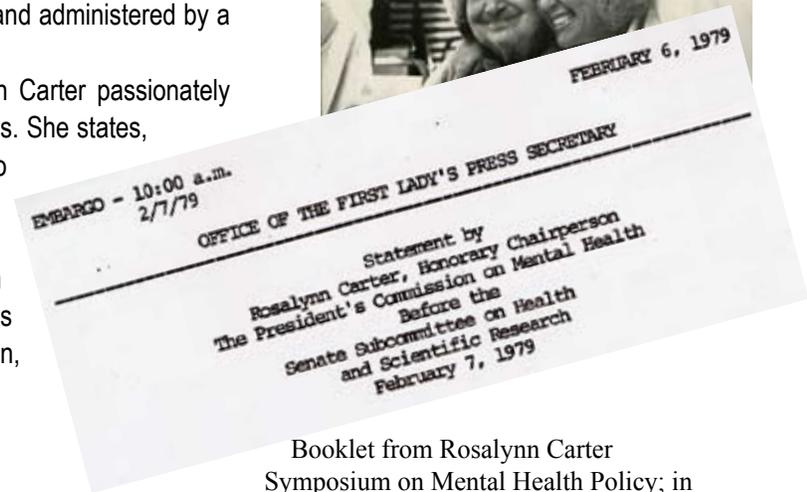
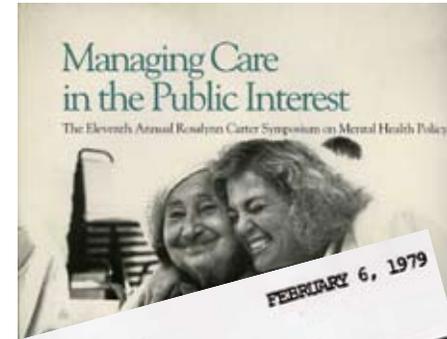
Her dedication to those who suffer from mental illness and combating the stigma associated with it

continues to this day. Through the Carter Center in Atlanta, Georgia, Mrs. Carter works tirelessly with mental health organizations nationally and worldwide. She chairs The Carter Center Mental Health Task Force, which identifies policy initiatives that affect the mentally ill. The Rosalynn Carter Symposium on Mental Health Policy is an annual event she has hosted since 1985. Each symposium focuses on a specific topic, such as childhood and elderly mental illness, financing mental health services, and treating mental illness in the primary care setting - usually in the home and administered by a female family member.

A long-time lobbyist for insurance coverage parity, Rosalynn Carter passionately demands equal coverage for mental as well as physical illnesses. She states, "I have always believed that if insurance coverage made no distinction among illnesses, a lot of the stigma of the mental illnesses would fade away. The fact that they were covered would make them acceptable. Creating a health care system that reflects parity acknowledges the need to see people as whole human beings, and it recognizes the worth of every person, regardless of his or her disability."

Nancy Reagan
champion of the "Just Say No" anti-drug program

When Nancy Reagan (1921-) became First Lady of the United States in 1981, statistics from the National Institute on Drug Abuse showed drug use was on the rise



Booklet from Rosalynn Carter Symposium on Mental Health Policy; in 1979 Mrs. Carter, as honorary chairperson of the President's Commission on Mental Health, addressed the Senate Subcommittee on Health and Scientific Research

across the country. In addition, drug abuse was particularly high in children ages 12 to 17. She decided her major goal would be to educate children and their parents on the adverse effects of drug abuse. The anti-drug program, "Just Say No!" was inspired by a spontaneous remark Mrs. Reagan made to a child who asked her what to say if offered drugs.

Nancy Reagan committed herself to her drug awareness cause, tirelessly reading and writing thousands of letters to children who wrote to her of their drug problems. By 1985 there were over 5,000 "Just Say No" after school clubs founded in the United States and abroad. Mrs. Reagan took her drug prevention campaign to the international level inviting first ladies from countries around the world to attend a conference on drug abuse in Washington, DC and Atlanta, Georgia. A crowning moment came when the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 was signed into law by President Ronald Reagan.

After leaving Washington, Mrs. Reagan founded the Nancy Reagan Foundation in Los Angeles. The Nancy Reagan Foundation merged with the non-profit BEST Foundation for a Drug-Free Tomorrow in 1994. Mrs. Reagan serves as an emeritus director of the BEST Foundation. The current curriculum is called Project ALERT, a two-year middle-school program for substance abuse prevention.



Hillary Clinton

head of the President's Task Force on Health Care Reform



What may have surprised some was “business as usual” for First Lady Hillary Clinton (1946 -) at the beginning of the Clinton administration in 1993. Only five days into office, President Clinton announced that the new First Lady would head the President’s Task Force on Health Care Reform. She plunged into the grind of health care reform, traveling throughout the country to drum up support for a National Health Care system. She gave countless interviews and speeches, toured health care facilities and clinics, and attended town hall meetings, symposiums, and round-tables. By September of that same year she testified before Congress, speaking to the House Ways and Means Committee on health insurance reform.

Former First Ladies Betty Ford and Rosalynn Carter joined forces with Mrs. Clinton in support of health care reform. Each spoke before the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee on March 13, 1994 urging that mental illness and substance abuse be included in overall health coverage. That July, bus tours were launched across the country in support of health care legislation. The “Health Security Express” tours were organized by labor and medical consumer advocate groups to help invigorate the health care movement which was meeting Congressional resistance for advocating “socialized medicine.” Hillary gamely rode on the bus that left from Portland, Oregon, and faced opposition head on at every stop along the 3,000-mile trek. But the complications of universal health care meant the death of the movement by September 1994.



Hillary Clinton has never given up her dream of health care reform; in fact, the issue of rising health care costs and uninsured Americans continues at an alarming rate for our country. She stated, “Health care reform is not a boxing match that goes 15 rounds and suddenly it is over. It is a journey...sometimes a rocky one, but nevertheless a journey that we must keep making together.”

Laura Bush

ambassador for The Heart Truth campaign

Women's health issues are a top priority for First Lady Laura Bush (1946 -). One of her dearest friends is Nancy Brinker, sister of breast cancer-victim Susan Komen, and founder of the Susan G. Komen for the Cure organization. She has been involved with "Race for the Cure" since her tenure as First Lady of Texas. When Mrs. Bush learned that heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women – outranking all women-specific cancers combined – she partnered with the National Heart Lung and Blood Institute to bring public awareness to the issues of heart disease and heart care. She became ambassador for the national women's heart disease



awareness campaign The Heart Truth in 2003.

As ambassador for The Heart Truth, Mrs. Bush has given numerous interviews and speeches throughout the country on the risks of heart disease. She stresses the importance of women to educate themselves on preventive measures that can save lives. The symbol for the Heart Truth is the red dress, and in 2005 all living First Ladies joined Mrs. Bush in support of women's heart disease awareness by donating one of their favorite red dresses for an exhibit at the Kennedy Center. Mrs. Reagan hosted another viewing at the Reagan Library in 2007. The National First Ladies' Library is honored to once again include these First Ladies' dresses as the unifying factor of Caring Hearts: The Health of a Nation.

Photos on these pages courtesy: The Heart Truth, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute

This exhibit is made possible from the generosity of the following individuals and institutions:

C-SPAN

Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library & Museum, Hyde Park,
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The Carter Center

The Heart Truth, National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute

The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library-Museum, West Branch, Iowa

The Museum at the George Bush Presidential Library

The Ronald Reagan Library and Museum, Simi Valley, California

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The William Jefferson Clinton Presidential Library and Museum



Caring Hearts: The Health of a Nation

November 25, 2008 - May 29, 2009

Sponsored By:



TOURS

All tours are guided and include both the changing exhibits at the Education & Research Center and the Saxton McKinley House, the restored Victorian home of First Lady Ida Saxton McKinley. Tours last about 1 1/2 hours.

Tour Hours: Tuesday - Saturday at 9:30 & 10:30 a.m. and 12:30, 1:30 & 2:30 p.m. **Tours Begin at the Education and Research Center, 205 Market Ave. S**

Reservations are required for groups of six or more, recommended for all others.

\$7 adults, \$6 seniors, \$5 children under 18 - includes both buildings; \$3 Education & Research Center only

Free Parking, Buses Welcome!



Education and Research Center - 205 Market Avenue S

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Canton, Ohio 44702

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