

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am accepting this award with conflicting emotions: very grateful for the recognition that it represents after more than 30 years in the profession, and at the same time very surprised at having been chosen as the honoree. This extremely important award conferred by the Pan American Health and Education Foundation (PAHEF) in honor of Dr. Abraham Horwitz, fellow Chilean and Director of the Pan American Health Organization for 16 years, has been received by three other Chileans, Drs. Fernando Monckeberg, Jorge Mardones Restat, and Ricardo Uauy, all of them noted academics and public health figures. This year, to my surprise, the honor goes to me, a public health specialist with a very different profile, a civil servant who has labored in Chile's Ministry of Health for over 20 years.

The most interesting aspect of my professional career has been the changes--epidemiological, political, cultural, and economic--that have marked it. When I began working at the Ministry of Health as the professional in charge of the Adult Health Program, the priority was child health: combating the high infant mortality and malnutrition rates; just 30 years later, the chief problems are chronic diseases in adults and obesity. In terms of political changes, I did most of my medical studies during the convulsive period of the Socialist government of Dr. Salvador Allende; later, I specialized in public health and joined the Ministry during the final years of the military government of Augusto Pinochet. Since 1990, I have worked for four different governments of the same political coalition: *la Concertación*. The technology revolution, with advent of personal computers and the development of communications (basically the Internet), combined with economic growth, have enabled Chile, despite its geographic isolation, to become integrated with the world, with a surging economy but like most of the countries of the Region, with great inequalities as well.

This is the context in which I have worked, always at the Ministry of Health, and, believe it or not, out of the same office. My job has been to bring together experts and opinionmakers, national and often international, no matter what their politics, to make progress in the development of policies, plans, and programs to fight the epidemic of chronic noncommunicable diseases. All of the technical assistance that I have received in my work has been disinterested, unremunerated.

Mine has been a silent, ongoing effort that, with the collaboration of many outstanding professionals, scientific societies, nongovernmental organizations, and the Ministry of

Health itself, has helped put adult health care and the prevention and treatment of chronic diseases among the country's health priorities. Today in Chile we have universal guarantees of access, timely treatment, and financial protection; preventive check-ups for adults and the elderly; diagnosis and lifelong treatment of people with hypertension and diabetes; treatment for acute myocardial infarctions; brain attacks; terminal chronic renal insufficiency; and most of the cancers for which effective treatments are available.

There is no doubt that all of these guarantees of treatment for the most prevalent chronic diseases have represented a great advance in terms of reducing their crippling complications and mortality, and also of meeting the needs and expectations of the population, without distinction. The challenge now is health; giving greater priority to prevention through intersectoral population-based health measures and more education in public health. At this time we are moving more to the left--in terms of the population, not politics—to address the main determinants of these epidemic levels, chiefly through the promotion of healthy eating, to prevent and combat obesity. Therefore, my latest obsession is to promote physical activity as the magic pill that can help reverse the determinants of the principal chronic diseases.

I would like to express my thanks to a great many people at PAHO who have offered me opportunities and supported me in the development of new projects: Dr. Jorge Litvak, former head of the Program on Adult Health, who understood the importance and urgency of starting to work to improve the health of the elderly in the Region; Dr. Helena Restrepo, who taught me that health must be addressed in a more community-based and political context; Dr. Franklin White, a driving force who made great progress possible in health care for people with diabetes through multidisciplinary efforts; the years of work with Armando Peruga and Sylvia Robles, also of PAHO; with Andrés Petrasovits (may he rest in peace), David Maclean, and Sylvie Stachencko of Canada, for their constant support in the creation and consolidation of the CARMEN Initiative, the Pan American network for the prevention of noncommunicable diseases, which has been in existence for 10 years now; and more recently, Dr. Branka Legetic and Alberto Barceló for their continued support.

At this time, I must not forget to mention my family--especially my husband, who is also a physician a clinician, thanks to whose unconditional emotional, not to mention financial, support has given me the peace of mind to devote myself to public health without the financial pressures of supporting my family.

To conclude, I accept this award with humility, because I believe that I represent a great mass of anonymous technical professionals working as public servants in my country and the Region. Honors like this one encourage us to keep working with the same effort and enthusiasm.