

Scary Stuff About The US Surgeon General

Some interesting and controversial things have happened with the post of US Surgeon General. Here are some tidbits you likely didn't know. Find the home site of author Bill Allin at [http: billallin.com](http://billallin.com)

Stuff You Probably Didn't Want To Know About The US Surgeon General

Created in 1871, the post of Surgeon General of the United States was the top position in the Marine Hospital Service. The SG's job was to stop the spread of diseases carried to US shores by merchant marines.

John Maynard Woodworth, the first to hold the post, developed a mobile group of doctors called the Commissioned Corps. Until 1971, the Surgeon General served in the Commissioned Corps. Since then the SG's only commitment has been to agree with everything the US president says.

The Commissioned Corps remains today as one of only seven services of the United States government that completes its work in uniform (not including postal carriers).

During the First World War, SG Rupert Blue included cigarettes as part of the basic field rations kit issued to men fighting in the US military.

It wasn't until 1964 that Surgeon General Luther Terry published a report accusing tobacco smoke as one of the prime causes of cancer. This triggered both the Cigarette Labelling and Advertising Act and an enormous campaign by Big Tobacco to deny, bribe, obfuscate studies and intimidate politicians in the position of passing legislation that would limit the profits of tobacco companies.

President George H.W. Bush's Surgeon General, Antonia Novello, continued the assault on Big Tobacco. Her brother-in-law, Don Novello, played the role of chain-smoking priest Father Guido Sarducci on Saturday Night Live and at other comedy venues.

Back in 1930, then Surgeon General Hugh Cumming initiated the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment. Its purpose was to study the effects of untreated syphilis in African American men. Again, that's cases of syphilis among African American men who received absolutely no treatment. The program continued under the next six Surgeons General.

The Tuskegee study was stopped only in 1973 was it was declared unethical, the judgment being that it's not healthy to leave syphilis untreated, no matter what skin colour a victim has. Fortunately, as syphilis (the *treponema pallidum* spirochete) can be transmitted through placenta, the study was not carried out with African American women.

In 1981, President Reagan's Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop, gained notoriety by writing candidly about the risks of AIDS. In a brochure he had mailed to every house in the United States, he wrote about sexuality and the dangers of unprotected sex.

Though he withstood the uproar his little publication aroused for bringing the subject of sex to public notice, the first black Surgeon General, Joycelyn Elders, didn't fare so well. She wanted sex education to be taught in schools so that kids would grow up knowing how to protect themselves from AIDS when they became sexually active. She was fired after only 15 months, the shortest term of any SG.

At a United Nations conference on AIDS, Elders was asked about masturbation as an alternative to sexual intercourse. She supported the idea. Alas, the morality police (once they recovered from swallowing their tongues in shock that anyone would even say the word masturbation out loud) went to work and made short work of her career. No audio or video tapes of that question and reply exist today, so her exact words remain unknown except to a few who were there in person.

Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona, under President George W. Bush, was asked to censor his reports on embryonic stem cell research, contraception and his opinions about abstinence-only as a method of contraception studied in sex education classes. Bush also asked Carmona to sprinkle Bush's name at least three times on each

page of every speech he gave.

Draconian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu of Romania, subsequently executed, was also known to insist that scientists include the name of their revered president in their speeches and writings.

SG Carmona was at one time a high school dropout. However, he received the Gold-Headed Cane award for his outstanding service with the Vietnam Special Forces. He also served as a paramedic and nurse. He went on to be a top graduate at the University of California Medical school.

President Dubya's nomination for Surgeon General of James W. Holsinger received great resistance because of Holsinger's reputation as anti-gay. In writing for the United Methodist Church, in 1991, he claimed that homosexuality is unnatural and unhealthy. Subsequently, studies have shown that homosexuals have a few notable physiological differences from heterosexuals, not the least being a considerable difference in the size of one part of their brain. No one knows why that is, yet.

Acting Surgeon General Robert A. Whitney, who served as SG between Novello and Elders, was a veterinarian. Despite jokes to the contrary, the US health infrastructure did not go to the dogs on Whitney's watch.

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Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems, a book about how, when and what to teach children so they know enough to live healthy lives as adults.

Learn more at <http://billallin.com>

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