

June 6 / Administration of William J. Clinton, 2000

## Statement on the Earthquake in Indonesia

June 6, 2000

I was saddened to learn of the earthquakes that shook the island of Sumatra and other parts of Indonesia. On behalf of the American people, I extend my deepest sympathies to all those who have suffered losses and injuries.

The United States is providing emergency assistance to support relief efforts and stands ready to provide further help to meet the needs of those affected by the earthquake.

## Remarks on Increasing Participation in Clinical Trials and an Exchange With Reporters

June 7, 2000

*The President.* Good morning everyone. We are here at this early hour to talk about a vitally important issue to the health of America's senior citizens—indeed, eventually, to the health of all of us.

We must help more seniors participate in clinical trials that test new therapies for illnesses, from cancer to heart disease to Alzheimer's. These trials may prolong lives, and they are central to finding cures for deadly diseases.

Today, America's seniors are badly under-represented in clinical trials, yet they bear the heaviest share of illness. More than half of our cancer patients are over 65, but only a third of those in clinical trials are seniors. For breast cancer, the statistics are even worse.

Today, thousands of important clinical trials don't have enough patients because so few seniors are able to take part, and that means slower progress towards curing or treating illness. One major factor keeping seniors out of clinical trials is patients' lack of certainty that their expenses will be covered by insurance. Because Medicare's policies on payment for clinical trials have been unclear, seniors cannot be sure of coverage if they volunteer for experimental care. Many assume they'll be saddled with thousands of dollars in routine medical costs if they participate, and they clearly cannot bear such a heavy burden.

For several years, Vice President Gore has led our efforts to clean up the confusion and help seniors and people with disabilities into clinical trials. We've had bipartisan support in Congress, led by Senators Rockefeller and Mack

and Congresswoman Johnson and Congressman Bentsen and Congressman Cardin.

Today, after careful study, I am signing an executive memorandum directing Medicare to change its policy and remove a major barrier to seniors' participation in these trials. Within a week, Medicare will begin to cover all the routine medical costs of participation in a clinical trial.

The Department of Health and Human Services and the Health Care Financing Administration will begin outreach programs so that patients, as well as doctors, researchers, and administrators, all are aware of the change. We'll ask for the help of advocates for patients and research who have done so much to publicize this issue. We believe that with good outreach, thousands of seniors could join trials this year and make a dramatic contribution to the progress of medicine, as well as to the health of older Americans.

I am also directing today the Department of Health and Human Services to report back to me on ways we can provide additional support to clinical trials that are especially relevant to senior citizens, and am requesting that the National Institutes of Health look for ways we can encourage even more seniors to speed science's progress by participating in new clinical trials.

As America ages, we must provide all our seniors affordable, quality health care, and we should be using our cutting-edge science to meet that challenge. Simply put, the more seniors we enroll in trials, the faster we'll be able to use these advances to save American lives.