

Powell discusses AIDS, sex issue in Africa

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Promiscuity and other risky sexual behavior must change to stop the spread of AIDS in Africa, Secretary of State Colin Powell said Saturday.

Young Kenyans, including an 11-year-old girl, had a frank discussion with Powell about promiscuity, resistance to condoms and the cultural expectation that young girls will have sex with much older men.

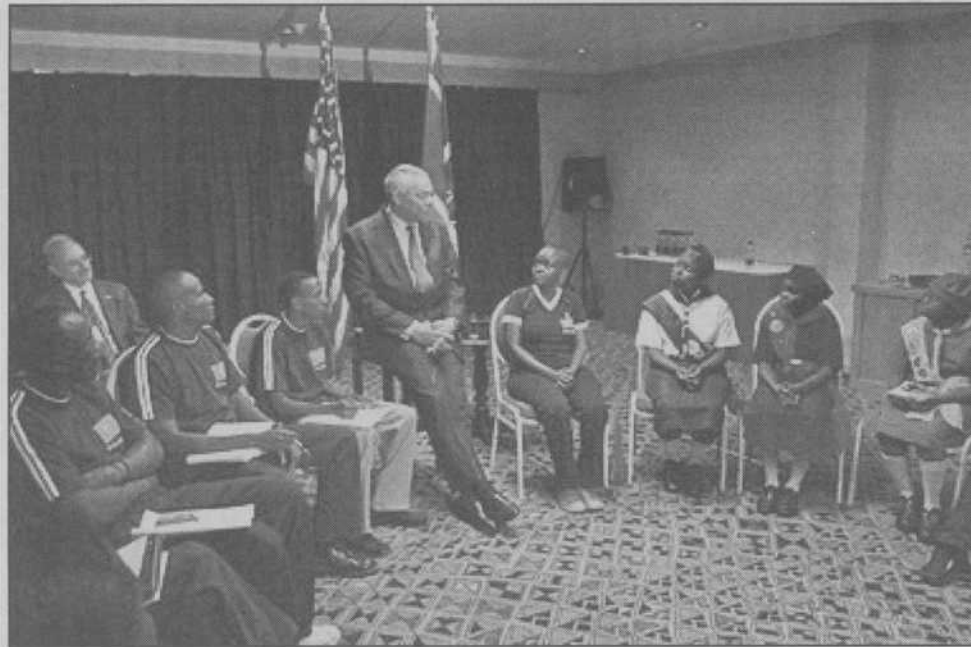
"Those sorts of patterns of behavior have to change to protect young people," Powell told the gathering.

Powell is in Africa to attend a signing ceremony ending north-south fighting in Sudan. The two-decade-old conflict is Africa's longest-running civil war. Powell met with Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki after the AIDS round-table Saturday.

The Sudanese peace accord does not address the more recent fighting and refugee crisis in Sudan's western Darfur region, which Powell has called genocide. He planned to press Sudanese government leaders to resolve the Darfur crisis during the weekend meetings.

About 7 percent of adult Kenyans are infected with HIV or have AIDS, a rate much higher than western nations but lower than some countries in southern Africa where 20 percent or more of the population is infected.

"Africa I think for too long a period of time ignored the problem, looked the other way and said 'no, this isn't happening here,'" Powell said.



U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell speaks with a group of Kenyan youth about the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Nairobi, Africa. Powell underscored Washington's commitment to battling HIV/AIDS, which he called the world's "greatest weapon of mass destruction."

Powell said.

He criticized African countries, without naming them, that denied AIDS was a problem. Powell also noted former South African President Nelson Mandela's disclosure this week that his son died of complications from AIDS.

"More and more people are willing to speak out about this and not hide," Powell

said.

AIDS kills more than 600 people every day in South Africa. Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, once denied knowing anyone who had died of the disease.

Powell sat in a circle with 19 Kenyans, most in their teens and 20s, who work to prevent HIV transmission among their peers. The discussion included blunt discussion of

sexual and cultural practices, including what 24-year-old Boniface Mwendwa described as social pressure for young women to have sex with "people we call sugar daddies."

Older men are much more likely than young girls or women to carry the disease, and older men-to-younger-women is a major source of transmission in Kenya and elsewhere.

"Are you getting through to the young people, or do you say you're square?" Powell asked.

Reception is better now than it used to be, Powell was told. Abstinence, faithfulness to a single partner and condom use are discussed much more openly than a few years ago, and more Kenyans are open about their HIV status. At least one of the young women who spoke to Powell on Saturday is HIV positive. The anti-AIDS message starts early. Eleven-year-old Grace Gathoni is a member of the Brownie patrol at her elementary school. She came to the meeting dressed in her uniform.

"We learn about HIV and AIDS, and sexually transmitted diseases," at school, she said. "We are also taught to value our virginity, our education and our life."

Before arriving in Nairobi on Friday, Powell spent five days touring countries hit by last month's killer tsunami. He said he will give President Bush a report Monday on the tsunami damage and U.S. aid to the region.

Report cites culture of blaming at King/Drew hospital

By Kevin Herrera
Special to Sentinel-Voice
LOS ANGELES (NNPA) — If Martin Luther King Jr./Charles R. Drew Medical Center was one of the thousands of patients it treats each year, its condition would be classified as critical and desperately in need of immediate, expert care, according to a report released Monday by an outside consultant hired to run the hospital.

Navigant Consulting Inc., which was hired by the county Board of Supervisors in October at a cost of \$13.2 million, released its first assessment of King/Drew that included nearly 1,000 recommendations for change, many of which will take much longer than a year to implement and cost millions of dollars more than what the county has contributed so far to the rehabilitation effort.

The assessment, which cited a "culture of excuses and blaming" at King/Drew and called for the staff of

entire departments to be re-evaluated for competency, comes just days after federal regulators warned county health officials that the hospital will lose \$200 million in funding from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services after failing inspections in December of the hospitals psychiatric units, which were found to be "sub-standard" by Navigant.

County health officials said they have one more chance to prove they have corrected the problems before Jan. 19, the cut-off date. Federal regulators have issues with the hospital's use of Taser guns and their procedures for handling aggressive patients, having failed three mock drills in which doctors and staff were tested on how they would respond to aggressive patients with mental disorders.

If the funding is removed, it is believed that the county would have no other choice but to close King/Drew.

In light of the Navigant report and the latest federal inspections, Supervisor Don Knabe Tuesday for county officials to draft a plan to create an independent health authority to run county hospitals — one of the recommendations made by Navigant and an idea that is supported by many, just as long as there are ample opportunities for input from hospital staff and the community.

According to reports, the board has rejected similar proposals for the last decade. However, Knabe said in light of the medical failings at King/Drew and threats to strip its funding, supervisors must reconsider the issue immediately, with a vote on the proposal expected as early as next week.

"I'm more than willing to look into having a public authority handle the entire health department," Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke said. "I don't think we

can realistically put together a public authority for just that one hospital."

Supervisor Mike Antonovich seemed to be the lone voice of opposition to the creation of the independent body, even though politics was cited as the most disruptive force in running King/Drew; the fear of political repercussion inhibited both politicians and staff members from taking action. His aide, Tony Bell, said Antonovich doesn't want to add another "layer of bureaucracy."

Financial constraints may hinder the creation of the independent body, county health officials said, especially when the "financial collapse of the [Health] Department is right around the corner."

Navigant found what many already knew — entire departments in disarray, inadequate performance reviews of physicians and an ineffective disciplinary sys-

tem. Some areas of the hospital are in need of repair and nurses lacked the equipment necessary to monitor the vital signs of patients.

The report also found that many on the "night shift" were sleeping on the job and sterile and non-sterile equipment were grouped together in one room. Students from health care training programs were often left unattended as well.

Navigant also found that in the past, instead of complying with hospital standards, staff members at King/Drew changed policies to fit their habits, often starting surgeries when they felt ready, leaving patients lingering. The human resources department was also found to be "largely dysfunctional for seven years," creating prob-

lems in handling worker's compensation claims.

Many physicians and nurses need to be retrained or fired, Navigant said.

There was some good news. Navigant listed several strengths at King/Drew, including physician and employee pride in the hospital, commitment and loyalty by long-term employees, support of the mission to provide comprehensive medical care to the community, medical school affiliation and diversity in the workforce and community support.

Health officials plan to meet with Navigant over the next few weeks to better understand the recommendations of the report.

"Our hope and expectation is that it will be a road (See King, Page 6)

Lawsuit

(Continued from Page 3)
series of more than 250 biographies that is widely respected for its journalistic quality and integrity."

The suit also says SportsCentury accused King of threatening to break the legs of heavyweight Larry Holmes and of cheating boxer Meldrick Taylor out of \$1 million from a fight and then threatening to have Taylor killed. "It was slanted to show Don in the worst way. It was one-sided from day one," Gary said. "Don is a strong man, but he has been hurt by this."

King has represented fighters from Ali to Mike Tyson, and

has been sued by several of them — including a \$100 million lawsuit filed against him by Tyson. King paid \$7.5 million to former middleweight champion Terry Norris in late 2003 to settle a suit. King sued former heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis for libel.

King also has beaten federal charges, including tax evasion and fraud. He served nearly four years in prison for the 1967 beating death of a man who owed him money. In 1954, he killed a man who was robbing a numbers house he operated in Cleveland, but it was ruled self-defense.

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