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Koop addresses health care issue

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Speaking in front of the University medical community Oct. 26, former U.S. Surgeon General C. Everett Koop said he saw no immediate cure for the health care crisis.

Koop accepted the first Frank A. Calderone Prize in front of about 350 people in the William Black building's Alumni Auditorium. The Calderone prize honors an individual's outstanding commitment to public health. Since his resignation from the post of surgeon general, Koop founded an institute for medical ethics at Dartmouth College, and has become chair of the National Safe Kids Campaign, the AIDS Care and Education Program, and the National Ready To Learn Council.

Most Americans are looking for immediate access to health care, the highest technology available, and the lowest possible cost. Instead of offering the people what they want,

Koop said the health care system has become, "a curse for many."

Most people entering emergency rooms of urban hospitals are confronted with a long wait, the anxiety of recovery, and most of all, the fear of not being able to afford treatment, Koop said, adding many people are victims of a Medicaid system that overestimates their ability to pay.

"Thirty-five million Americans have no health insurance," he said.

Koop drew a direct correlation between people's lack of insurance and the threat of a serious illness. Many Americans have incomes too low to live on, and too high to make them Medicaid eligible, which leaves "millions of Americans living an accident away from financial disaster."

Koop said poverty is far too abundant in America, a rich country.

"[Poverty] is at the root of drug and alcohol abuse, malnutrition, communicable diseases, and infant mortality," he said.

Koop attributed spiraling high

costs to health professionals' competition for high technology, exorbitant pharmaceutical prices, rising salaries for many health care employees, and the growing cost of treating both the elderly and AIDS patients.

In the form of a cure, Koop proposed reduction of administrative costs, malpractice reform, a crackdown on fraud and abuse, and reform of the informed consent policy, which is an agreement between the doctor and patient. Koop added the country could save \$200 billion by cutting back on procedures which are medically unnecessary.

Due to lobbyist pressure in Washington, D.C., politicians often find it difficult to implement their own health care reform packages, Koop said.

Koop said Bush has certainly encountered the pressure groups, while Democratic Presidential nominee Gov. Bill Clinton, if elected, will confront them over his health care proposals for the first time.