

IOF Women Leaders' Roundtable, May 11, 2002, Lisbon

## **Speech by Ann Richards**

Like Camilla Parker-Bowles and Regina Prado, I have personal experience with osteoporosis.

I shepherded my mother through her last illness and death.

Over about five years, Mama sort of broke off in pieces.

She broke her arm.

She broke her wrist.

She broke her hip.

And then her mental capacity began to go.

What have I learned from her dying?

I learned that the decision to take care of yourself — or not to take care of yourself — affects the people you love as much as it affects you.

I learned that early diagnosis and treatment can prevent the worst of the disease and minimize its effects.

I first suspected something was going on with own my bones when my shirt collars did not fit the same as they had in the past.

After Mama was diagnosed, I had bone density scans and learned that I have early stage osteoporosis.

As a result, I take medication to help my bones.

To strengthen my bones and muscles, I lift weights and walk regularly.

I take calcium and other supplements.

Fruits and vegetables comprise the majority of my diet.

I eat a lot of fish.

I don't even let them put fat foods and carbohydrates on the plate ... because I don't want to test my almost perfect will power.

I am determined to make my body strong.

And I am determined to spread the message that we can take charge of our health.

We accept too many hardships as a natural part of aging.

And we are uninformed about what we can do to help ourselves.

Studies in my country show that women are rarely counseled about osteoporosis until they have the disease ... or worse, until their first fracture.

In my own case, even though I had broken my hand and my ankle, I had to ask my doctor for a bone density test.

And I know that in many other countries, it is not only practice, it is government policy to withhold testing and treatment until after the first fracture.

The previous speakers have already discussed the price we pay for the failure to diagnose and treat early.

Right now, the European Community spends 4.8 billion Euros every year for hospital health care related to osteoporosis.

And that figure represents a 33% increase over the last three years.

In the United States, we spend \$17 billion a year treating osteoporosis and the injuries it produces.

If we do not act, that figure will increase to \$60 billion over the next 20 years.

But the truly tragic cost is in the lives of the women — and men — who could have avoided the disease or the worst of it ... and the families who suffered with them.

Through prevention and early diagnosis, we can save our medical systems hundred of million of dollars in treatment costs ... and eliminate needless suffering.

We don't have to die the way our mothers did.

I am living proof.

Last summer I was in New York walking down Madison Avenue ... and the next thing I knew, I had tripped over a piece of plywood ... and fallen — literally — flat on my face.

It took 20 stitches and surgery later to improve mobility in my eyebrow.

But I did not break one bone.

I know that, without medication and a good health regimen, I would have.

I am 68 years old ... and I never felt better in my life.

I know it is a cliché ... but it is God's truth: If I can, you can.

The good news is that we can all get well.

I expect nothing less for myself and my daughters and granddaughters.

I hope we will accept nothing less for women all over the world.