

Fellow med students,

As most of you are now officially into your fourth year and one step closer to receiving your hard-earned MD's, I want to invite you to join the Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility. This is an organization that was founded in 1979 here in WA as the state chapter of the national organization PSR. The national organization, in turn, is the American arm of the International organization IPPNW—International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War. IPPNW was the recipient of the 1985 Nobel Peace Prize for its work in nuclear disarmament. In those days, it was not politically popular to be making alliances with the cold war enemy Russia...but that is exactly what this organization did. Alliances were made by physicians around the world who recognized the public health nightmare of nuclear weapons. PSR was instrumental in lobbying support for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty—they raised awareness about the fact that atmospheric testing of nuclear weapons was directly responsible for the Strontium-90 that was appearing in children's teeth! We just had an international review of the Nuclear Non-proliferation treaty in New York City in May—unfortunately, this very important treaty is beginning to unravel. We need to continue to raise our voices about the insanity of our thousands upon thousands of weapons of mass destruction. (Please see this short video (macromedia flash) for an idea of the magnitude of nuclear weapons we have: <http://www.truemajorityaction.org/bensbbs/>)

In Washington state, we carry two major icons of the nuclear weapons era: the Hanford Nuclear Reservation and the Trident Submarine base in Bangor, WA. The Hanford Nuclear Reservation is the site where the Plutonium used in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs was forged. Although their nuclear weapons production has ceased, the site continues to be an environmentally hazardous dump for radioactive waste and mixed radioactive waste (filling up unlined trenches dug in the ground). Last month, a jury awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars in compensation to two individuals—Hanford downwinders—who had developed thyroid cancer as a result of their exposure to Hanford radiation. Washington state voters overwhelmingly (by the largest initiative margin in history) passed I-297, the clean-up Hanford initiative, in November 2004—but legal challenges by the Federal Department of Energy (some filed minutes after the passage of the initiative) has tied the issue up in the courts. Bangor, WA represents another very real danger and physical reminder of the power of nuclear weapons. Did you know that Washington State has one of the single largest stockpiles of nuclear weapons in the world? If Washington State were to cede from the United States, Washington would become the world's third largest nuclear superpower!!! Last year, it was reported that when one of the nuclear-tipped missiles was being unloaded from the USS Georgia, the missile collided with a ladder left in the holding tube punching a nine-inch hole in the missile's nose cone (http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/local/164710_missile13.html?searchpagefrom=1&searchdiff=475).

In fact, a few years ago, when Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility's Executive Director asked at a public League of Women Voters forum Admiral Scenter, a retired admiral who was commander of the Pacific Fleet what in fact was the mission for all our trident Nuclear Submarines was, he simply replied: to keep them safe and secure and not have an accident.

This is the type of misguided policy that our government can implement when democratic participation wanes. It costs 17.6 billion dollars annually to maintain our stock nuclear weapons. When we lament the fact that we have little public monies for health and social services, for cleaning up environmental toxins and other such programs, we have to point the finger at the excessive spending that goes into maintaining and building new nuclear weapons, landmines, new varieties of napalm that have been dropped in the middle East, and the bombing of hospitals and clinics (that I reported to you all about in a previous email). This is not sustainable. What else is unsustainable? Our oil-economy. This is going to get old very soon. Already US Military bases have encircled the remaining major oil reserves in the world. We have to think "Beyond Oil". This in fact was the title of an event that WPSR helped host in May. We brought over 200 people together from the labor, peace, and environmental movements to talk about this and to develop proactive solutions. WPSR was instrumental in lobbying the state legislature earlier this year to adopt "Clean Car" legislation—this would bring

our automotive emissions standards in line with California's—the most stringent standards in the world. The legislation has passed both the House and Senate and is awaiting signature by Gov. Gregoire. WPSR has also been involved in coalition work around issues of social justice such as finding alternatives to the War on Drugs, CAFTA, and the privacy-invading portions of the patriot act. These policies have not only a tremendous negative impact on public health, but they also run counter to the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

WPSR allows you to join voices with a very reputable state organization. Jim McDermott sits on our board of sponsors and went on a WPSR-sponsored trip to Iraq before the war to see the effects of the sanctions on the Iraqi people. You can be involved in the organization—receive newsletters a few times a year and learn about what the organization has been up to. Invite WPSR speakers from our Speakers Bureau to talk to groups about our issues. Volunteer your time and energies (though I know you don't have much free time as fourth year med students) for legislative lobbying or public education. Most importantly, WPSR can give you an incredible opportunity to learn about “the story behind the story” when it comes to war and peace and environment and human health—and be connected with an organization that has hope for a healthy planet for our future and actively works to achieve that. As you know, genetics and behavior are not the only two determinants of ill-health; social and political forces factor prominently. Become a socially-responsible physician and join WPSR! You can go to <http://wpsr.org/join/students.htm> If you are a first-time member, joining WPSR is free! Stay tuned to hear about WPSR's upcoming annual dinner on Oct. 22. Click here to read about our awesome keynote speakers: <http://www.lannan.org/lf/cf/detail/lucy-boulanger-and-john-fogarty-awarded-2004-cultural-freedom-fellowship/>

I would be honored if you all (my fellow classmates (though we've been a year apart)) would become involved in this organization. We've had our political debates over the years, but being socially responsible is one thing I think we can all agree on. Wearing your white coat carries that obligation.

Thanks for reading this far.

Cheers,

Sunil
WPSR President, 2004-6
And e-0deuce member