

Joycelyn Elders

Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joycelyn_Elders

was the United States Surgeon General from September 8, 1993 to December 31, 1994, most famous for her outspokenness on sensitive issues of public health.¹

Early life

Elders was born **Minnie Lee Jones** in Schaal, Arkansas. In college, she changed her name to **Minnie Joycelyn Lee** (later she used just Joycelyn). In 1952, she received her B.A. in biology from Philander Smith College in Little Rock, Arkansas. After working as a nurse's aide in a Veterans Administration hospital in Milwaukee for a period, she joined the United States Army in May, 1953. During her 3 years in the Army, she was trained as a physical therapist. She then attended the University of Arkansas Medical School, where she obtained her M.D. degree in 1960. After completing an internship at the University of Minnesota Hospital and a residency in pediatrics at the University of Arkansas Medical Center, Elders earned an M.S. in Biochemistry in 1967.

Elders then received a National Institutes of Health career development award, also serving as assistant professor in pediatrics at the University of Arkansas Medical Center from 1967. She was promoted to associate professor in 1971 and professor in 1976. Her research interests focused on endocrinology, and she received certification as a pediatric endocrinologist in 1978. She became an expert on childhood sexual development.^[*citation needed*] Elders received a D.Sc. from Bates College in 2002.

Surgeon General

In 1987, Governor Bill Clinton appointed Elders as Director of the Arkansas Department of Health. Her accomplishments in this position included a tenfold increase in the number of early childhood screenings annually and almost a doubling of the immunization rate for two-year-olds in Arkansas. In 1992, she was elected President of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers.

In 1993 after Clinton was elected president, he appointed her United States Surgeon General, making her the first African American, and the second woman, to hold the position (Antonia Novello was the first). She was a strong backer of the Clinton health care plan. As surgeon general, Elders quickly established a reputation for controversy. Like many of the surgeons general before her, she was an outspoken advocate of a variety of health-related causes. She argued for an exploration of the possibility of drug legalization and backed the distribution of contraceptives in schools. President Clinton stood by Elders, saying that she was misunderstood.^[1]

In 1994, she was invited to speak at a United Nations conference on AIDS. She was asked whether it would be appropriate to promote masturbation as a means of preventing young people from engaging in riskier forms of sexual activity, and she replied, "I think that it is part of human sexuality, and perhaps it should be taught." This remark caused great controversy, especially

among conservative Christian groups and right wing interests in the United States. President Clinton asked for her resignation.^[1]

Life after government

Since leaving her post as surgeon general, she has returned to the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences as professor of pediatrics. She is also a regular on the lecture circuit, speaking on issues related to AIDS and teen pregnancy.

Elders wrote a book in an attempt to present her side of the controversies that surrounded her during her 18-month tenure as surgeon general. Already reviled by conservatives for advocating abortion rights and condom distribution in schools, Elders drew fire — and censure from the Clinton administration — when she suggested that legalizing drugs might help reduce crime and that the idea should be studied. Almost immediately afterward, her son Kevin was arrested for cocaine possession, in what she still believes was a frame-up designed to embarrass her and the president.^[2]