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AGS Foundation for Healthy Aging
2007 Lifetime of Caring Gala
Garry Neil, MD, President J&J Pharmaceutical Research
Remarks 10/11/07

Thank you very much _____ for that kind introduction.

I'm honored to accept this award on behalf of my dedicated colleagues at Johnson & Johnson.

It's also a great honor to be here with Senator and Mrs. Glenn...

The word hero is used a lot these days, but in Senator Glenn's case, it's a fitting description...

...not only because he's been a brave astronaut and a dedicated senator.

But because he has demonstrated by example that older Americans can be vital – and even a little daring – well into their later years!

But John Glenn isn't the only one...

...And it's our job to help older Americans remain productive members of their communities for as long as possible.

(Pause)

Our company and others in biomedical research have made a great deal of progress in extending life over the last 40 or 50 years.

In 1963, only 17 million Americans lived to celebrate their 65th birthdays. Today, that number has doubled.

By 2030, the older population will more than double again to 70 million....

And over the next 50 years, the number of people living to 100 years or older is going to skyrocket to a million or more.

I hope I'm one of them!

But as we all know, living longer is only part of the goal. Now we're trying to make "healthy aging" real for more and more people.

And the challenges are great.

Take Alzheimer's disease. Some people say we're going to have to spend trillions of dollars on nursing homes to handle all the aging baby boomers.

But the fact is, we DO NOT have the resources to handle them...

So we need to create a very different reality... a reality in which investments in research will give us a real chance to keep these patients

- at home longer
- independent longer
- and productive longer.

This is not just about healthcare, science and economics...

As a society, we need the wisdom and knowledge of our older citizens...

(Pause)

Recently, the media recognized the 50th anniversary of Sputnik as a call to action for America to get moving into space...

And from that call to action came John Glenn and his Mercury comrades...

These brave men weren't just heroes of a great era. They inspired me, and many in my generation, to become scientists...

Today, we need older Americans, like John Glenn, to continue inspiring us...

And we'll need their knowledge, insights and skills to help us maintain and strengthen our leadership as a nation and the prosperity we've come to enjoy.

As the baby boom generation – my generation – moves into old age, our society can also use a dose of our still-burning desire to change the world!

(Pause)

Not long ago, I spoke at a conference on Alzheimer's disease. Right in front of the lectern was a table of relatively young Alzheimer's patients and their spouses.

I could see great hope on their faces – hope that we in the biomedical community could do something for them.

It was an emotional experience to meet with them, feel their hope and fears... and share my hopes with them.

Why am I hopeful? Because in my lifetime:

- The iron lung machine has become obsolete...
- Mental institutions are closing because of huge advances in neurological medicine...
- AIDS, once a death sentence, is now a manageable, chronic disease...
- Even ulcers are now being treated with a pill instead of surgery.

These and other advances have radically altered the healthcare landscape... So why wouldn't it happen with Alzheimer's and other diseases of aging?...

Why can't we make nursing homes as obsolete as the iron lung machine?

When I looked into the hopeful eyes of the patients at that conference, I could say with some confidence that we've done it before, and we will do it again...

At J&J, the largest healthcare company in the world, we're doing our part.

And with our colleagues and partners in research, we're on the threshold of great advances...

... from new medicines that show real promise for changing the course of Alzheimer's...

...to the recent discovery of the "longevity" gene, which may offer a degree of healthy aging that once was just a dream.

And so, inspired by people like John and Annie Glenn – and the hopes of millions of patients -- we will continue to work hard to turn healthy aging from a dream into a reality...

(Pause)

Ben Franklin must have been peering into the distant future when he put this dream so simply: “All would live long, but none would be old.”

Along with my research colleagues at J&J, I am proud to be on the front lines of this noble effort.

Thank you again for this wonderful honor.