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TITLE: Life crusader: Satcher pushes health and social issues
 BYLINE: M.A.J. McKenna STAFF WRITER
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In tapping Dr. David Satcher to be the U.S. surgeon general, the Clinton administration has found someone who has not only worked with the challenges of public health, but has lived them.

Satcher, who reportedly will be nominated today, is a physician and Ph.D. geneticist who, before he came to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in 1993, had spent 15 years as a medical school professor and administrator. Yet both his work and his life give evidence of passionate care for the health of minorities, women and the young.

At the age of 2, close to death with whooping cough on his family's Alabama farm, he was saved by a rural doctor. After 11 years of marriage and four children, he watched his first wife die of breast cancer.

As president of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, he guided the historically black school's merger with a historically white hospital, saving the alma mater of two out of every five black physicians nationwide from closing down.

When he came to the CDC, Satcher not only named those same issues ---women's health, minority health, the young ---as priorities, but expanded on them. Urban handgun violence and AIDS prevention, he declared, were as much CDC's responsibility as poor sanitation in rural areas and lethal viruses in the Third World. "If you look at the major cause of death today, it's not smallpox or polio or even infectious diseases," he said shortly after being named CDC chief. "Violence is the leading cause of lost life in this country today. If it's not a public health problem, why are all those people dying from it?"

In his four years at CDC, Satcher made good on those sentiments. He backed initiatives that increased U.S. childhood immunization by 50 percent, fostered an early detection system for both emerging infectious diseases and the severe epidemics of food-borne disease that have swept the country, and boosted cancer prevention and screening programs.

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But he also oversaw initiatives that are unlikely to increase his popularity on the conservative side of the aisle. The CDC's work on handgun violence became so controversial that it has disrupted the agency's 1996 budget negotiations. Following accusations by 10 senators, including former presidential hopeful Bob Dole, that CDC research was slanted against firearms, congressional Republicans voted along party lines to strip the agency of \$2.6 million ---precisely the amount it had spent the previous year on firearms research.

Satcher, though, has experience in controversy: As an undergraduate at Morehouse College, where he headed the Atlanta chapter of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, he was frequently arrested during sit-ins. Tales told of his early 1960s protest activities all stress the same point: When sent to jail, he always had school books with him.

That devotion to work shines through in the stories told of Satcher's childhood. One of eight surviving children of parents who never finished grade school, Satcher, now 56, spent hours each day commuting to school: The only bus spared to pick up black children for the segregated local schools took hours to crisscross the entire county. Before and after the long, bumpy rides, he worked in the local steel foundry and on the family's 40-acre farm. During breaks from field work, according to his brother Robert, the kids would quiz each other on vocabulary words from Reader's Digest: "He kind of embarrassed me, because he would always beat me."

Satcher went from Calhoun County to Morehouse, where he earned a bachelor of science degree in 1963. He tried for medical school at Duke University, then effectively all white, and was rejected; almost 20 years later, he described the rejection as "one of the biggest downers in my life." He went instead to Case Western Reserve University, earning both a medical degree and a Ph.D. in cytogenetics in the same year, 1970.

Medical residency took him to New York state, where he began an apparently lifelong interest in community and minority health: He worked first on sickle cell anemia in New York, then on hypertension in Los Angeles, both diseases with historically high incidence among black people. The interest in sickle cell took him into administration: He became associate director of the King-Drew Sickle Cell Center in Los Angeles, then chair of the Drew Postgraduate Medical School's department of community medicine, then dean of the school.

In 1978, his wife, Callie Frances Herndon, also an Anniston native who had studied at Spelman, died of breast cancer, two years after the birth of their fourth child. Following a promise he had made to her, Satcher brought their children ---Gretchen, David, Daraka and Daryl ---back to Atlanta, becoming professor and departmental chair of community and family medicine at Morehouse Medical School. Eighteen months later, he remarried, to the poet Nola Smith.

After three years, Satcher was lured to Nashville, to head the

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historic but faltering Meharry. It was once the strongest black medical program in the country, funded by and named for a white farmer saved from a crippling wagon accident by a black man, but the school lost its market niche when formerly white institutions began to admit black students. When Satcher arrived, Meharry's training ground, Meharry-Hubbard Hospital, was begging for patients; at the same time, its crosstown rival Metropolitan General Hospital was turning patients away.

Meharry had first proposed the institutions collaborate in 1893, but its black students weren't allowed into the white hospital until 1985. After 96 years of rejection and four years' struggle by Satcher, Meharry took over Metro General in 1993.

The same year, Satcher arrived to head the CDC. He leaves it now for a high-profile and potentially risky Washington bid, undergoing the same process that wrecked the nomination of his former colleague Dr. Henry Foster. With luck, he will be able to draw on the commitment that he has tapped since a hot summer day in Anniston when, halfway through plowing a field, he realized medicine was his life's work:

"I wish I could tell you that I have never looked back, but that's not true," he said in his Meharry inauguration speech in 1982. "But every time it seemed there was a major challenge or disillusionment or doubt, I would go home. I would sit around the fire and talk with my parents, and I would go back to that field.

"And all of a sudden again I would feel all of the confidence and assurance that I felt on that day between seventh and eighth grade. And every time, I found that I was being challenged to expand my horizons."

ART: A CLOSER LOOK Name: Dr. David Satcher Age: 56
Hometown: Anniston, Ala. Family: Wife, Nola; four children.
Education: Bachelor's degree in science from Morehouse College, Atlanta, 1963; medical and doctoral degrees at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, 1970. Experience: Director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention since 1993; president of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tenn., 1982-1993; professor and chairman of community and family medicine at Morehouse School of Medicine; interim dean of family medicine at King-Drew Medical Center, Los Angeles, 1977-1979. Awards: Phi Beta Kappa at Morehouse; Watts Grassroots Award for community leadership, 1978; elected to Institute of Medicine and the National Academy of Sciences, 1986; Nashvillian of the Year, 1992; Ebony magazine's black achievement award, 1994; Breslow Award in Public Health, 1995; American Medical Association's Dr. Nathan B. Davis Award, 1996.

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TITLE: 'STRAIGHT TALK' IS SATCHER PRIORITY
BYLINE: Associated Press.
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(Copyright 1997)

President Clinton's nominee to be surgeon general pledged Friday to cut through the mysteries of science and offer every American, especially the poor, a chance for better health.

"I want to be the surgeon general who reaches our citizens with cutting-edge technology and plain, old-fashioned straight talk," said Dr. David Satcher, now director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Whether we're talking about smoking or poor diet, I want to send messages of good health to our cities and our suburbs, our barrios and reservations, and even our prisons," Satcher said at the White House announcement of his nomination.

Satcher called the job "the opportunity of a lifetime."

He spearheaded the CDC's immunization campaign that brought preventable childhood diseases to record lows, and he helped start an early-warning system to detect new diseases before they cause epidemics.

Clinton said Satcher's priority as surgeon general must be "to free our children from the grip of tobacco." The president said 90 percent of smokers get hooked in their teens.

Vice President Al Gore said the soft-spoken doctor was expected to be "a true field commander in the war against underage smoking."

This is Clinton's third attempt to fill the long-empty post of surgeon general. Dr. Joycelyn Elders left in 1994 after criticism of her frank comments about sex education and masturbation. The nomination of a successor, Dr. Henry Foster, fizzled because of a furor over abortions he performed. Even the acting surgeon general is gone, having left the temporary post on July 1.

Satcher, whom the National Medical Association calls a "champion of the disadvantaged and underserved," is not expected to face much opposition.

Sen. Jim Jeffords (R-Vt.) said his Labor and Human Resources Committee will examine Satcher's nomination quickly. Sen. Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), himself a physician, said, "I'm confident that Dr. Satcher will reclaim the integrity historically associated with the position of surgeon general."

But the nomination disappointed some.

"He's another bland bureaucrat," said Steve Michael of the

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activist group ACT-UP, which says the CDC does too little to fight the AIDS virus among young, gay men and drug users.

"He won't use this as a bully pulpit, the way C. Everett Koop or Joycelyn Elders used it. That's the kind of person we need," Michael said.

Satcher also was nominated to become assistant health secretary. The two jobs haven't been held by the same person since the 1970s.

Satcher, 56, has been director of the Centers for Disease Control since 1993.

ART: PHOTO;

Caption: PHOTO: Dr. David Satcher, accompanied by President Clinton, outlines his goals Friday if he becomes U.S. surgeon general. Senate reaction to his nomination has been favorable, and most expect confirmation. AP photo.

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TITLE: SATCHER A WISE CHOICE AS SURGEON GENERAL

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Story type: EDITORIALS

THE nation is getting another pointer about the wealth of talent associated with Meharry Medical School in Nashville.

The White House has tabbed former Meharry president Dr. David Satcher to become U.S. surgeon general and assistant secretary of health. Under the President's plan, the two jobs would be consolidated for the first time since the 1970s, when Julius Richmond served in that capacity under Jimmy Carter.

The country won't find a better candidate. Satcher, currently director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, has been in his current job since 1994. Since taking over at the CDC, Satcher has demonstrated the same type of leadership he gave Meharry.

His nomination to the surgeon general's post, subject to Senate approval, follows the unsuccessful bid to name another Meharry figure, Dr. Henry Foster, to the job sometimes called the "nation's doctor." Foster's nomination was a victim of vicious politics in Washington, as several lawmakers used his background in obstetrics to tear him down in a debate over abortion.

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It's safe to say the White House did a thorough job in assessing Satcher's record. After the back-to-back debacles of a controversial term by Joycelyn Elders and the failed Foster nomination, the Clinton administration needs a smooth confirmation process. Satcher is likely to deliver.

In addition to building an impressive resume in medicine, Satcher has been a strong voice at the CDC. Under his guidance the center has assumed a leading role in the fight against tobacco and in raising awareness about the importance of immunizations for children.

Satcher would also bring vision to the surgeon general's job. The merger of services between Metro's General Hospital and Meharry-Hubbard Hospital, now on a steady course, was Satcher's idea.

It remains to be seen just how the linking of the undersecretary's job and the surgeon general's post will play out. But the nation's surgeon general has always played an important symbolic role as a bully pulpit on important health issues. Satcher would bring strong personal skills and a keen intellect to the job. The country should get to see Satcher perform on an even higher plane than his current role allows. The Senate would be wise to confirm him. Another sign of talent linked to Meharry

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TITLE: Surgeon general nominee: technology, straight talk
Satcher is third attempt to fill the long-vacant post
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CREDIT: Associated Press
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(Copyright 1997)

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- President Clinton's nominee to be surgeon general pledged Friday to cut through the mysteries of science and offer every American -- especially the poor -- a chance for better health.

"I want to be the surgeon general who reaches our citizens with cutting-edge technology and plain, old-fashioned straight talk," said Dr. David Satcher, now director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"Whether we're talking about smoking or poor diet, I want to send messages of good health to our cities and our suburbs, our barrios and reservations, and even our prisons," Satcher said at the White House announcement of his nomination.

Satcher, who called the job "the opportunity of a lifetime," is

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best known for fighting to prevent diseases from ever striking. He spearheaded the CDC's immunization campaign that brought preventable childhood diseases to record lows, and he helped start an early-warning system to detect new diseases before they cause epidemics.

But Clinton said Satcher's top priority as surgeon general must be "to free our children from the grip of tobacco." Clinton said more Americans die of smoking-related diseases than from AIDS, car crashes, murders and suicides combined -- and that 90 percent of smokers get hooked in their teens.

Vice President Al Gore said the soft-spoken but steely doctor was expected to be "a true field commander in the war against underage smoking."

This is Clinton's third attempt to fill the long-empty post. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders left in 1994 after criticism of her frank comments about sex education and masturbation. The nomination of a successor, Dr. Henry Foster, fizzled because of a furor over abortions he performed. Even the acting surgeon general is gone, having left the temporary post on July 1.

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But the nomination disappointed some.

"He's another bland bureaucrat," said Steve Michael of the activist group ACT-UP, which says the CDC does not do enough to fight the AIDS virus among young, gay men and drug users.

Satcher also was nominated to become assistant health secretary. The two jobs haven't been held by the same person since the 1970s.

Satcher, 56, has served as CDC director since 1993. He was president of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tenn., for 10 years.

The son of a foundry worker, Satcher graduated in 1963 from Morehouse College and became the first black student to earn simultaneously a medical and doctoral degree at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland in 1970.

ART: CAPTION: President Clinton looks on as Dr. David Satcher, his choice for surgeon general, speaks at the White House on Friday after the president announced the nomination of Satcher, currently director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.;

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