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National Stuttering Awareness Week, 1988

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

The uniquely human ability to communicate thoughts through speech allows us to share our ideas almost as quickly as they occur, with little conscious effort. But for the more than three million Americans who stutter, speech is associated with struggle. Rapid-fire repetitions of sounds, prolonged vowels, and verbal blocks disrupt the smooth and easy flow of speech and limit the spontaneous exchange of ideas and feelings. Many stutterers suffer frustration and embarrassment that can lead to harmful emotional stress.

Stuttering has a tendency to be inherited, and it affects four times as many males as females. Children usually outgrow stuttering before reaching adulthood. When the disorder continues or begins in adults, it is considered chronic and very difficult to control.

Just what causes stuttering is not yet known, but research is providing clues. In normal speech, the brain and more than 100 muscles of the vocal system work together to produce fluent sounds. Within the larynx, one set of muscles contracts to pull the vocal folds apart and works in close coordination with the set of muscles that allows the folds to close. In stuttered speech, however, these muscle sets do not coordinate properly, preventing normal movement of the vocal folds.

Focusing on this specific malfunction, scientists at the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke (NINCDS) have developed a promising, but as yet experimental, treatment for severe chronic adult stutterers. Injections to the larynx temporarily paralyze one of the muscles, easing the disruptive tug-of-war between opposing muscles and thereby improving speech.

The NINCDS leads the Federal government's research effort on stuttering, funding projects around the country in addition to conducting studies in its own laboratories. Research supported by private voluntary health agencies adds to the growing pool of knowledge. These private organizations also provide invaluable counseling and other services to stutterers and their families. Together, Federal and private groups call attention to simple ways the public can help; for example, many stutterers actually improve their speech when listeners know to be patient and supportive.

To enhance public awareness of stuttering, the Congress, by Public Law 100-263, has designated the period of May 9 through May 15, 1988, as "National Stuttering Awareness Week" and authorized and requested the President to issue a proclamation in observance of that event.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the period of May 9 through May 15, 1988, as National Stuttering Awareness Week, and I call upon the people of the United States to observe that week with appropriate ceremonies and activities.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this thirteenth day of April, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twelfth.

Ronald Reagan