

The Public's Health and the Law in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century  
5th Annual Partnership Conference

Keynote Address

*“Pandemic Flu: The Threat, Health System Implications, and Legal Preparedness”*

**Admiral John O. Agwunobi, MD, MBA, MPH, Assistant Secretary for Health,  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

Tuesday, June 13, 2006  
2:00-3:30 pm

The senior-most health official in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Dr. John Agwunobi has a lead role in shaping the federal government's approach to a potential influenza pandemic and similar infectious disease outbreaks.

In his keynote address, Dr. Agwunobi will review the nature of the threat posed by an influenza pandemic and steps DHHS and state and local governments are taking to protect Americans' health should a pandemic occur. Among those are practical "legal preparedness" steps that address such issues as interstate mutual aid agreements and services rendered across state lines by health care professionals.

Dr. Agwunobi also will explore the potential, lasting impact an infectious disease pandemic could have on the Nation's health system, bringing to bear the perspective of his current position as well as his extensive, prior experience as health commissioner for the state of Florida.

John O. Agwunobi was confirmed by the U.S. Senate on December 17, 2005 to be Assistant Secretary for Health (ASH), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and an Admiral in the US Public Health Service Commissioned Corps. As the ASH, Dr. Agwunobi serves as the Secretary's primary advisor on matters involving the nation's public health. He also oversees the US Public Health Service and its Commissioned Corps for the Secretary.

Dr. Agwunobi is a seasoned public health professional with experience in health care delivery, managed care, and health policy. Prior to becoming the ASH, Dr. Agwunobi served as Florida's Secretary of Health and State Health Officer, under Governor Jeb Bush, from October 2001 to September 2005. Dr. Agwunobi confronted many public health challenges during his tenure, including leading the state's public health and medical response to the unprecedented four major hurricanes that struck Florida in 2004. In addition, the day after being named Secretary, Dr. Agwunobi led the Florida Department of Health in its response to the nation's first-ever intentional anthrax attack. He subsequently guided the state's nationally-recognized efforts to prepare for, prevent, respond to, and mitigate the effects of a bioterrorism attack.

As Secretary, Dr. Agwunobi moved the Department toward increased efficiency, customer focus, and productivity. He led the call for a healthier Florida, advocating for improved nutrition and exercise in an effort

to address the state's epidemic of overweight and obesity. His Department's many successes included responses to West Nile, SARS, and numerous other infectious disease outbreaks, efforts to decrease the state's infant mortality rate, lowering tobacco use among young Floridians, addressing racial and ethnic health disparities, and improving overall access to medical and dental care.

As a pediatrician, Dr. Agwunobi dedicated himself to working with underserved populations. Before moving to Florida, Dr. Agwunobi was Medical Director and Vice President of Medical Affairs and Patient Services at the Hospital for Sick Children, a Washington, DC-based pediatric rehabilitation hospital and community health care provider. He simultaneously served as medical director for an affiliated managed care plan, where he maintained a network of more than 2,300 physicians and specialists.

Dr. Agwunobi completed his pediatric residency at Howard University Hospital in Washington, DC, rotating between Children's National Medical Center and the District of Columbia General Hospital--then one of the nation's busiest inner-city hospitals. In addition to his medical degree, Dr. Agwunobi holds a Master of Business Administration degree from Georgetown University in Washington, DC, and a Master of Public Health degree from the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health in Baltimore, MD. He is also a certified managed care executive.

Dr. Agwunobi has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including Public Administrator of the Year, APHA Public Health Hero Citation, and Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters. He previously served as Chair of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Advisory Committee to the Director, and on the Board of Directors of the National Quality Forum--an advisory group formed at the recommendation of the President's Advisory Commission on Consumer Protection and Quality in the Health Care Industry.

Dr. Agwunobi has a passion for leadership and innovation and sees his role as Assistant Secretary for Health as an opportunity to enhance the Secretary's efforts to further the mission of HHS and the health of the nation by building, strengthening, and leveraging relationships across the public health community and the US Public Health Service.