

11 of 994 DOCUMENTS

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Working Profile: Dr. Donald Macdonald; Found: A Warm Heart Among the Bureaucrats

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Dr. Donald Ian **Macdonald** sees no point in containing his delight when the hot line rings in his office and the caller is a member of the Cabinet.

He also cannot imagine disguising the tears that fill his eyes when he talks of his son's recovery from a **drug** habit or of the similar ordeals of teen-agers he used to treat as a small-town pediatrician.

In a city of starchy bureaucrats, many of them jaded and cool, Dr. **Macdonald** brings a sense of wonder and emotional openness that has disarmed Government types who were skeptical when President Reagan appointed him two years ago to head the Alcohol, **Drug** Abuse and Mental Health Administration, a part of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Dr. **Macdonald** is now serving as Acting Assistant Secretary in charge of the department's Public Health Service, the division that oversees the **drug** abuse agency, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers For Disease Control and the Food and **Drug** Administration. And he is said to have made such a mark in Washington that he is on the "short list" of candidates for the permanent post.

"It's been a miraculous sort of life," Dr. **Macdonald** said one recent afternoon as he reconstructed an unlikely path that took him from an ocean-front pediatric practice in Clearwater, Fla., to a position where he is in charge of a \$10 billion budget and 40,000 employees. "I'm like a kid discovering something new all the time."

Until the early 1970's, Dr. **Macdonald's** life was proceeding smoothly, with his practice flourishing, his four children entering adolescence and his wife active in local Republican political affairs. Then shortly after his 40th birthday, he passed into what he describes as "my male menopause," grew a beard, ditched his coat and tie and tried his hand at sailing and painting.

It was in this self-absorbed episode, Dr. **Macdonald** continued, that his son Andy, then 15 years old, "got in trouble" and was taken to a psychologist who detected the boy's **drug** problem. Unknown to his parents, that problem had escalated to a dozen joints of marijuana a day plus alcohol.

"The psychologist said, 'I can't help you because he's stoned,' " Dr. **Macdonald** recalled.

Andy **Macdonald**, now a 21-year-old pre-law student at Emory University, spent 10 months in treatment at **Straight**

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Inc., a **drug**-abuse program for adolescents that has spread nationwide from its base in St. Petersburg, Fla.

Stunned by his own ignorance as a parent and physician, and impressed with the **Straight** program despite periodic contentions that it is coercive, Dr. **Macdonald** wrote a book about **drug** abuse, began to concentrate on abuse among his patients and began an intensive tour of the country, lecturing on the subject. In the process he met, and apparently impressed, Nancy Reagan, who has made **drug** abuse her White House mandate, and Dr. Carlton E. Turner, President Reagan's deputy assistant for **drug** abuse policy. They urged Dr. **Macdonald's** appointment to his first Federal post over the objections of those who doubted his qualifications, including Margaret M. Heckler, then Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Dr. **Macdonald** understood the objections to his original appointment and even agreed with his detractors that his management experience was limited, as was his background in scientific research, and that his affiliation with **Straight** had raised the specter that he was a zealot.

"People wondered why I wasn't angry," Dr. **Macdonald** said, "but everything they were saying was true.

"Now, I feel very comfortable here in having proved myself."

Dr. **Macdonald**, now 54 years old, brought to his job in Washington some of the lessons he had learned about **drug** abuse in teen-agers.

"The way to reach kids is not through their rotten behavior," he said. "A kid knows he's a bum. The way to reach a kid is to see pain, sadness, death. When you say, 'You look like you're hurting,' the response is amazing. They look at you like maybe you have something to say to them."

Parents, Dr. **Macdonald** says, are often harder to reach since a diagnosis of **drug** abuse seems to carry with it blame. The surest sign of trouble, he discovered, is a mother's response when asked when she last had a good night's sleep.

"You ask that question and they start to cry," Dr. **Macdonald** said, his own eyes filling at the memory. "They may have no understanding what's going on, but they know when their kid is in difficulty."

As he sits in the assistant secretary's office these days, Dr. **Macdonald** marvels at the nice things people are saying about him. Fred Cogan, an aide to Dr. Turner, for example, says Dr. **Macdonald** is a man "with no hidden agendas" and "a smile you can hear over the telephone."

When Dr. **Macdonald** first moved to his corner suite in the Health and Human Services building in downtown Washington, he regarded himself as "a neutral guy without aspirations," reluctant but dutiful about his temporary post. Then, he says, he felt the bubbling of ambition.

And now he is relaxed and enjoying the opportunity to hobnob with the country's leading scientists and health care experts and to carry out some pet projects, like the encouragement of programs affecting children and the recent appointment of an AIDS coordinator for the Public Health Service.

"One of the things I've loved seeing in Government is the balance between the amateurs and the pros," Dr. **Macdonald** said. "This is the way our country was started, by amateurs with high ideals and purpose."

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