

Contact: Mark Carpenter
(202) 225-2301



Rx: Health Care FYI #11

Subject: *Primary Prevention Lowers Health Care Costs*
From: *Rep. Tim Murphy (PA-18)*

Primary prevention involves efforts to reduce disease risk before symptoms appear through the use of such actions as education, lifestyle changes, public health programs and vaccinations. **Secondary prevention** also includes the use of screening for those who are at increased risk for certain diseases because of lifestyle, environment, age or family disposition.

The problem: Too many Americans live unhealthy lifestyles, which leads to increased risk for disease and higher health care costs. Obesity, a lack of exercise, tobacco use, alcohol abuse, and poor nutrition are putting unnecessary stress on an already overburdened health care system.

Obesity:

- Nearly seven of every 10 U.S. adults are overweight, and about three of every 10 are obese. Estimated annual costs of obesity-related diseases in the United States is \$100 billion.¹
- In the last ten years rates of obesity have doubled in children and tripled among teenagers thus increasing incidence of diseases usually associated with older adults such as diabetes and increased blood pressure.
- Annual hospital costs for obesity-related disorders in children ages 6 to 17 years increased from \$35 million to \$127 million between 1979 and 2000.²

Lack of Physical Exercise:

- 38.6 percent of United States adults report no leisure-time physical activity. The annual estimated cost for diseases associated with physical inactivity in 2000 was \$76 billion.³
- Daily participation in physical education classes by high school students dropped from 42 percent in 1991 to 29 percent in 1999, even though physical activity is known to have many beneficial effects on health.⁴

Tobacco Use:

- 46 million or more than 1 in 5 adults in this country are current smokers.⁵
- According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), the direct and indirect medical costs of smoking are estimated to be \$138 billion per year.⁶

Alcohol Abuse:

- The economic costs of alcohol abuse due to lost earnings, medical services and premature deaths are estimated to have been \$184.6 billion in one year.⁷

Primary prevention saves money:

- The State of California estimates that their statewide tobacco prevention program resulted in an overall cost savings of \$8.4 billion from the years 1990-1998.⁸

¹ *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics - 2005 Update*. American Heart Association: 2003.

² Wang G, Dietz WH. Economic burden of obesity in youths aged 6 to 17 years: 1979-1999. *Pediatrics* 2002; 45:439-445.

³ *Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics - 2005 Update*. American Heart Association: 2003.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Guidelines for school and community programs: Promoting lifelong physical activity. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* 1997;46: 1-36.

⁵ Centers for Disease Control. *Substaining State Programs for Tobacco Control*. Data Highlights 2004.

⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *Prevention Makes Common Cents*. September 2003.

⁷ Harwood, H. *Updating Estimates of the Economic Costs of Alcohol Abuse in the United States: Estimates, Update Methods, and Data*. Report prepared by The Lewin Group for the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2000.

⁸ California Department of Health Services Tobacco Control Section. *California Tobacco Control Update*. August 2000; 1-9.

- A recent review of health promotion and disease management programs in businesses that provided health education to their employees including exercise programs, health-risk screening and appraisal, weight control, nutrition information, stress management, disease screening, and smoking cessation found a significant return on investment for these programs, saved from \$1.49 to \$4.91 (median of \$3.14) in benefits for every dollar spent on the program. For Example:
 - Motorola's wellness program, saved the company \$3.93 for every \$1 invested.
 - Northeast Utilities WellAware Program, in its first 24 months reduced lifestyle and behavioral claims by \$1,400,000.
 - Caterpillar's Healthy Balance program, is projected to result in long term savings of \$700 million by 2015.
 - Johnson & Johnson's Health and Wellness Program, has produced average annual health care savings of \$224.66 per employee.⁹

The patient's role:

- Prevention starts at home. Exercise personal responsibility, eat balanced diets and healthy meals, limit alcohol and tobacco use.
- Lead by example. Establish an exercise, and healthy nutrition program for you and your family.

The federal government's role:

- In January 2005, the U.S. Department of Health of Human Services announced new *Dietary Guidelines* to provide advice for people two years and older about how proper dietary habits can promote health and reduce risk for major chronic diseases.
- The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports has began the President's Challenge to promote an active lifestyle of physical activity for 30 minutes a day/5 days a week (or 60 minutes a day for youths under 18).
- The Carol White Physical Education program of the U.S. Department of Education, provided over \$69 million in grants in FY 2004 to assist local educational agencies and nonprofit, community-based organizations to initiate, expand, or improve physical education programs, including after-school programs, for students in one or more grades from K-12 to help students make progress toward meeting State standards for physical education.
- For seniors, the Medicare Modernization and Drug Improvement Act now provides coverage for a "Welcome to Medicare physical," with counseling about preventive services, screenings, immunizations, and referrals for other care. The act also provides coverage of: Diabetes and cardiovascular screening; Colorectal cancer screening; Prostate cancer screening; Osteoporosis screening; Glaucoma screening; Pelvic exam; Diabetes self-management training and education; Smoking cessation and Nutrition therapy.

Recommendations:

- Hold workshops to promote healthy lifestyles in your districts.
- The federal government could provide incentives and educate businesses on the financial benefits of promoting a healthy workforce through exercise/nutrition programs and health-risk screenings.
- Strengthen initiatives to educate the public on health risks, personal responsibility and solutions. Include information on how these avoidable conditions are major contributors to spiraling health care costs.
- Leverage federal resources at the Department of Veterans Affairs, in Medicare and Medicaid, and at our nation's schools to promote primary prevention.

⁹ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Prevention makes common cents. September 2003

Congressman Tim Murphy, a member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, is a psychologist, and holds two Adjunct Associate Professor positions at the University of Pittsburgh (Pediatrics, and Public Health). He is Co-chair of both the Congressional 21st Century Healthcare Caucus and the Congressional Mental Health Caucus.