

Riverwalk Natural Health Clinic
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Cutting Health Care Cost at a National and Individual Level

On January 9, 2009 the Wall Street Journal published an article called "Alternative Medicine is Mainstream," written by Deepak Chopra, Dean Ornish, Rustum Roy and Andrew Weil. It discusses how to make health care affordable to all Americans by addressing the cause of an illness through diet and lifestyle changes rather than relying only drugs and surgery.

The article quoted President Obama in his health care plan as stating "The nation is facing a true epidemic of chronic disease." Ninety million Americans today have a chronic disease and these individuals are responsible for 75% of the country's health care cost. The cost of treating chronic disease is approaching \$1 trillion and will further increase as the baby boomers age.

What is chronic disease? Cardiovascular disease is the #1 killer in both men and women. Chronic disease also includes high blood pressure, high cholesterol, strokes, diabetes, cancer and chronic lung disease which are responsible for 75% of the American deaths today.

Why the epidemic of chronic disease? Because treating chronic disease with drugs never gets to the root cause. In fact study after study shows that chronic disease can be prevented by simple dietary and lifestyle changes such as healthy eating, eliminating smoking, exercise and weight loss. Yet, very little is done in preventing chronic disease in our society. In fact, our children are becoming predisposed to chronic disease such as heart disease and diabetes at an early age because of their poor eating habits.

Heart disease is associated with too much saturated fat in the diet, high stress levels and not enough exercise. Studies show that if a person has an angioplasty and does not change their lifestyle such as diet and exercise their chances of having another angioplasty in 4 yrs is 90%.

According to data from the American Heart Association 1.3 million angioplasty procedures were performed in 2006 in the US at a cost of \$48,399 each totaling over \$60 billion dollars, 448,000 coronary bypass operations were performed at a cost of \$99,743 each totaling more that \$44 billion. Just in 2006, Americans spent more than \$100 billion dollars for these two procedures.

High blood pressure is associated with too much salt, caffeine and alcohol in the diet, high stress levels and not enough exercise. I commonly see blood pressure levels come down when patients eliminate alcohol.

High cholesterol is associated with too much saturated fat in the diet. Saturated fats include red meat and dairy products. High cholesterol is also associated with not enough fiber and not enough exercise.

Diabetes is also associated with too much saturated fat, not enough fiber, too much sugar and not enough exercise. We are now seeing kids 8-9 years old with adult onset diabetes which was unheard of ten years ago. Kids today are not playing outside as much they're more likely to watch TV, play on the computer, do video games and eat junk food.

According to the American Cancer Society one third of all cancers are due to dietary factors and another third of all cancer are due to tobacco use. The other third of all cancers may be related to all kinds of different factors such as genetics, heredity, chemical exposure, environment factors etc. We spend billions of dollars a year on finding the cure for cancer. Yet, 60% of the Americans today are obese. And the young people today are still smoking. Increase cancer rates are associated with too much saturated fat, not enough fiber, not enough exercise, cigarette smoking and charcoal grilling of foods.

I want to stress that the epidemic of chronic disease is not being treated properly. People are getting on drugs merely to treat the symptoms and they're not getting to the cause of the health problem which is their diet and lifestyle. Many people have a hard time believing that by changing your diet, not smoking, exercise, having social support and reducing stress levels can cause even more powerful changes than drugs or surgery. People simply do not know how what they need to do to change these habits.

Simple dietary and lifestyle changes may even reduce health care costs nationally and individually. It can also increase overall health and longevity. Patients need to start taking greater responsibility for their overall health. Since most chronic diseases can be prevented look first to dietary and lifestyle changes before you seek out that magic bullet approach. You may end up saving a lot of money on your future health care cost.