



FACTS

Physical Activity Promotion in Healthcare

Overview

The health care sector is one of the nation's largest industries. It's comprised of people and physical resources devoted to providing health-related services. The settings for the delivery of healthcare are varied—they range from solo or small groups of physicians to large multispecialty clinics; community health centers for low-income individuals to hospitals of all sizes and include government systems such as the Veterans Administration, and allied health professionals (therapists, nurses, technicians, assistants, etc.).ⁱ

Healthcare has traditionally concentrated on diagnosing and treating injuries and illnesses, all with a goal of pain reduction and increased quality of life.ⁱ Healthcare can and in many cases does include preventative services – immunizations, screenings, etc. but rarely has physical activity been formally included, yet physical inactivity is widely recognized as a major contributor to a host of chronic diseases. The evidence is overwhelming that physical activity and diet can reduce the risk of developing numerous chronic diseases and in many cases in fact reverse existing disease.ⁱⁱ

Health care providers are valued as influential sources of health information and often have a unique opportunity to intervene and encourage daily physical activity when seeing their patients, however most don't routinely address it.ⁱⁱ

The Costs are Astounding...

There have been a variety of studies on the economic burdens of chronic disease with one of the most recent conducted by the Milliken Institute in 2007. For each of the seven most prevalent diseases, cancer, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart disease, pulmonary conditions and mental disorders, they calculated the number of people with a reported case, the treatment costs, and lost productivity and workdays.ⁱⁱⁱ The numbers are somewhat startling and they alone should be enough to spur action to reduce the instances of such diseases and lessen their severity when possible. Consider the following...

- Two-thirds of the rise in health care spending from 1987-2006 is due to the rise in the prevalence of treated chronic disease.^{iv}
- More than 109 million Americans report having at least one of the seven most common chronic diseases, for a total of 162 million cases.ⁱⁱⁱ
- The total impact of these diseases on the economy is \$1.3 trillion annually. Of this amount, lost productivity totals \$1.1 trillion per year, while another \$277 billion is spent annually on treatment.ⁱⁱⁱ
- On the current path, in 2023 projections include a 42 percent increase in cases of the seven diseases, or \$4.2 trillion in treatment costs and lost economic output.ⁱⁱⁱ
- More evidence based research is needed to demonstrate that physical activity interventions from within the healthcare community are effective at increasing the amount of physical activity a patient gets and ultimately reducing the incidence/severity and resulting cost of chronic diseases. Anecdotal data, while sometimes fascinating is not enough to spur policy change at a broad level.

Best Practices and Model Interventions

- Four nurse managed health clinics in Arizona turned physical activity turned into a vital sign.. During patient interactions, clinic staff discussed patients' physical activity and how the patients could meet the U.S. guidelines if they patients weren't already doing so. The program was under the leadership of ASU College of Nursing and Health Innovation.
- The American Physical Therapy Association's Section on Pediatrics worked with the Walt Disney Company to host a three-day conference that focused on a lifelong approach to community participation in sports and fitness and included the Walk Disney World Marathon Weekend More than 50,000 runners and supporters received fitness literature including and a "Fit for Life" stuffed toy bear.

Policy Changes to Increase Physical Activity-A National Physical Activity Plan

The United States first National Physical Activity Plan (Plan) was launched in 2010 with a vision: One day, all Americans will be physically active and they will live, work, and play in environments that facilitate regular physical activity.^v The Plan, a public-private sector effort, consists of a set of policies, programs, and initiatives directed to increasing physical activity in all segments of the American population. The Plan provides a roadmap to get America moving. It addresses the medical, educational, behavioral, policy, and physical infrastructure issues that affect how and why so many Americans are not moving. It unites professionals across sectors – in medicine, education, recreation, sports, and fitness, public health, transportation and urban planning, and business – in a massive effort to collaborate and solve the problem. Countless numbers of organizations are working together to change our communities in ways that will enable every American to be sufficiently physically active.

Immediate Priorities for the Healthcare Sector

- **Make physical activity a “vital sign” for health care providers to assess and discuss with patients/clients.**
 - Gain commitments from major health care professional organizations that they will encourage their members to assess patients’ physical activity including discussion of ways they can work toward meeting the U.S. Physical Activity Guidelines.
 - Work with the National Committee of Quality Assurance (NCQA) to develop a Healthcare Effectiveness Data Information Set (HEDIS) measure for physical activity in adults.
 - Develop and disseminate joint messaging to major health care professional organizations to share the importance of physical activity with their members.
 - Increase the number of health care providers that meet the Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans will increase by 40 percent by Sept. 2015.
 - Work with major electronic medical record companies to include physical activity tracking fields in their software.
- **Include physical activity education in the training of all health care professionals.**
 - Conduct a survey of the largest health care organizations to identify current and best practices in counseling patients on increasing physical activity.
 - Develop core competencies to promote physical activity in health care practice by August, 2011.
 - Gain commitments from minimum of twenty medical specialties/health professional organizations to adopt physical activity core

competencies and design a continuing medical education module by September, 2015.

- **Advocate at the local, state and institutional levels for policies and programs that promote physical activity.**
 - Develop and disseminate a survey to identify health care professional society members who are interested in advancing physical activity policy initiatives.
 - Once identified, create a network of health care society champions to advocate policies and programs that promote physical activity.
 - Engage a minimum of 75% of health care professional societies to lead, facilitate, or participate in a physical activity policy or program at the local, state, or institutional level by September, 2015.

The National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity (NCPA) is the leading force in the country promoting physical activity and fitness initiatives. NCPA is a diverse blend of associations, health organizations, and private corporations, advocating for initiatives and policies that encourage Americans of all ages to become more physically active. NCPA is providing the leadership for implementation of the National Physical Activity Plan. For more information, visit <http://www.physicalactivityplan.org>

- ⁱ Patrick, Kevin & Pratt, Michael & Sallis, Robert E. (2009). The Healthcare Sector's Role in the U.S. National Physical Activity Plan. *Journal of Physical Activity & Health*, 6 Suppl 2. S211 – S219
- ⁱⁱ Roberts CK, Barnard RJ, Effects of exercise and diet on chronic disease. *Journal of Applied Physiology*, 2005 Jan;98(1):3-30.
- ⁱⁱⁱ DeVol, Ross and Bedroussian, Armen et al. “An Unhealthy America: The Economic Burden of Chronic Disease. Charting a New Course to Save Lives and Increase Productivity and Economic Growth.” Milken Institute. October 2007
- ^{iv} Thorpe K. “The Rise In Health Care Spending And What To Do About It.” *Health Affairs*. 2005. Also, Thorpe K, Florence CS, Joski P. “Which Medical Conditions Account For The Rise In Health Care Spending?” Updated by Author using Medical Expenditures Panel Survey. AHRQ. 2007.
- ^v U.S. National Physical Activity Plan (2010). National Physical Activity Plan. Retrieved January 5, 2011, from <http://physicalactivityplan.org/theplan.php>

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