

Well, Well, Well ... and I Mean That Literally!

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Well, well, well, I thought, as I read the special report in the *USA Today*, "Drug Revolution Shakes Industry."¹ The report touted medicine's changing mission of disease prevention, requiring that the pharmaceutical industry develop drugs that help prevent or delay disease rather than just treating the end results. The gist of the article was that the trend in medicine is now "prevention" because of a "dawning realization that even better versions of traditional remedies are failing against such diseases as Alzheimer's, heart disease and cancer." This signals a critical shift regarding the future focus of research money and marketing.

For years, we chiropractors have been saying that the prevention of injury and disease is the surest method to achieve and maintain good health at any age. Ridiculed by the "powers that be" in the past in favor of the great advances the pharmaceutical companies had made in the eradication of disease after its appearance, the idea of prevention was never considered to have much merit.

Why prevention? Why now? The realization that there will never be the perfect magic bullet for all the world's ills may be part of this phenomenal shift, but the timeliness of the prevention concept is motivated by a combination of other factors:

1. the emergence of a massive aging population whose members continue to live longer, thus straining the already strapped Medicare program;
2. a plethora of easily accessible health information available to all age groups;
3. a middle-aged population that refuses to grow old;
4. an increase in minority populations that culturally incorporate alternative health care concepts and practices; and
5. a seemingly robust economy that offers a variety of alternative health care goods and services.

Each year, greater numbers of Americans are looking to nontraditional providers for their health care needs. The Office of Alternative Medicine, soon to be come the Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, is upgrading its facilities and funding from an initial \$2 million a year to \$20 million in 1998. In 1999, funding will reach \$50 million!² Since this funding had to come from the designated health care pie, in effect, medical funding was reduced by these same figures. If the initial amount of \$2 million wasn't enough to make the medical/pharmaceutical industries take notice, \$50 million is another story.

Prevention is the brother of wellness. A healthy population costs less than a sick population; a healthy population uses fewer and less costly medical services; and healthy people miss fewer work/school days, resulting in steadier production, and on and on.

For much of its history, geriatric population studies dealt strictly with disease. Age and disease/disability were perceived to go hand-in-hand. Shifting the focus to prevention allows millions of government research dollars to become available to study the 95 percent of the geriatric population who still live in the community. Here researchers are finding an even more dramatic distinction between age and disease as they uncover the characteristics, habits and lifestyle patterns of healthy, older adults. Some of these individuals have been practicing healthy diet and exercise habits for 40 or 50 years! These elders chose wellness and health decades ago.

Wellness is a powerful concept. In terms of practice, this should be a great year. With the media emphasizing prevention of illness and injury, you can expect more new patients to chiropractic. Part of the importance of your mission as a chiropractor is to educate your patients about their responsibility to maintain it. Consider offering a class to discuss the current health topics and issues. Display posters in the office promoting the class and list the topics to be covered. Add some controversial ones to get your students eager to participate. After all, wellness is the key to everyone's quality of life.

As always, if you have a particular question or would like to see a topic covered in a future column, please contact me by e-mail, or send a self-addressed stamped envelope to the address below. Aloha!

References

1. Friend T. Special report: drug revolution shakes industry. *USA Today* November 24, 1998;17A-18A.
2. Office of Alternative Medicine gets promotion. *Dynamic Chiropractic* 16(24):pp. 1, 49.

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