

PREVENTION BEGINS HERE

The preventable causes of death in this country have been known for a long time. (McGinnis and Foege- JAMA 1993). The ones at the top of the list- tobacco, obesity and lack of physical activity- have not changed with the passage of time. (Mokdad et al. JAMA-2004) An interesting scorecard is published every year by the United Health Foundation. It is called America's Health Rankings. In the 2006 edition Louisiana was 50th.

A look at a few of the rankings from this edition reveals the following about Louisiana.

1. Prevalence of Smoking- percent of population-22.6%; Rank 37.
2. Prevalence of Obesity- percent of population-30.8%; Rank 48.
3. Cardiovascular deaths- deaths per 100,000 population-355.4; Rank 42
4. Cancer deaths- deaths per 100,000 population- 233.3; Rank 48.

Should this be a challenge for us at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center- New Orleans? Of course!!!!

Prevention comes in three forms: primary where one prevents or delays the onset of disease or injury; secondary where one discovers disease or injury at the earliest possible moment in its evolution in order to change its course and tertiary where one maximizes the performance of those with disease and injury. For too long we have spent our time and resources mainly on health care delivery. We must never lose sight of the long range benefits of primary prevention. We all have risk for particular diseases. Identifying the disease and any accompanying risk demands that we proceed with the appropriate preventive measures.

In a health sciences center prevention must start with you. "I am my own first patient". If this can become a part of your daily thinking then collectively we can take on many of the preventable challenges in our population especially some of those outlined in the State Health Rankings. If we don't then the cost of future health care will be an ever increasing burden on society and the continuing rise of life expectancy will be reversed. In addition the number of years separating health expectancy and life expectancy will widen.

Where can you start? THE WELLNESS CENTER.

What can YOU do next? That depends on YOU and your hopes for your society.

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