

## **Your Life...Quality or Quantity – Which One Is It?**

In the early 1900's, people primarily died from infectious diseases. The four leading causes of death in the United States then were: pneumonia, tuberculosis, diphtheria and influenza. People had a life expectancy of a little more than 43 years. Thanks to the discovery of antibiotics and advances in their development, deaths due to infectious diseases in the second half of this century have declined dramatically. **As we move into the twenty-first century, we find people primarily suffering and dying from what are known as chronic degenerative diseases.** These include: coronary artery disease, cancer, strokes, diabetes, arthritis, macular degeneration, cataracts, Alzheimer's, dementia, Parkinson's disease, multiple sclerosis and rheumatoid arthritis. The list goes on and on.

**Even though the average life expectancy in the United States has increased dramatically during this past century, our quality of life due to these chronic degenerative diseases has taken a major hit.** Thus, we are essentially, "living too short and dying too long," as expressed in a speech written by Dr. Myron Wentz, a prominent Immunologist and Microbiologist.

How long do you expect to live? Let's set aside the quality of life for a moment and consider how the year compares with other industrialized nations in the world when it comes to life expectancy and health care. **In 1950, the United States ranked seventh among the top twenty-one industrialized nations in the world when it came to life expectancy.** As you might imagine, we have spent far more money on health care since that time than any other country in the world. In 1998, we spent more than one trillion dollars on health care, averaging 13.6 % of our gross national product. That is more than twice as much as the next closest nation. We have every kind of advanced imaging technology and tests available. Did all of our medical advances increase U.S. life expectancy?

**In 1990, our nation ranked eighteenth in life expectancy when compared with the same twenty-one industrialized nations 40 years prior.** That is losing ground in a major way! In spite of the trillions of dollars Americans spent on health care, we are now considered one of the worst industrialized nations in the world when it comes to life expectancy. The health care system we claim is the best in the world is actually one of the worst when we look at how long Americans live – or don't live; however, you might look at it. I asked how long you expect to live; but, now envision what your last twenty years will look like. Are you getting your money's worth? I personally and professionally do not believe that most people are.

**I can assure you that the majority of my patients today are not as concerned with the number of years in their lives as they are with the quality of life of those years.** Are you? The number of years we live is not usually the most important consideration when it comes to evaluating our approach to health care. Who wants to live to a ripe old age when recognizing our closest family members is impossible because of Alzheimer's dementia? Who looks forward to suffering with severe back pain because of degenerative Arthritis? Interestingly, almost no one seems to die of old age anymore. More than 60 million Americans suffer from some form of cardiovascular disease; more than 13.6 million have coronary artery disease. Although, a decrease has occurred in the number of cardiovascular deaths in the past 25 years, it still remains the number one cause of death in the United States. There are 1.5 million heart attacks each year and about ½ or just over 700,000 are fatal. The first sign of heart disease in more than 30 % of the cases is sudden death from a coronary episode. Sudden death does not give us time to make lifestyle changes to improve our health. Instead, time's up!

In spite of the tremendous amount of money spent on cancer research and treatment, cancer still remains the second leading cause of death in the United States. There were 537,000 cancer deaths in 1995. There has been a steady increase in the number of deaths caused by cancer over the past 30 years. The U.S. has spent more than 25 billion dollars in cancer research over the past 25 years only to see absolutely no decrease in the relative number of people dying from cancer. The greatest advances in cancer treatment have developed because of earlier diagnoses of certain cancers – not that our treatments for cancer have been pleasant or overly effective. Basically... we are not able to attack these ailments

the way we did with the infectious diseases. Doctors, patients, the whole health care industry alike, must take a long, hard look at how we approach health care today.

I urge you to do so! It's unfortunate when there is an overwhelming attitude in many individuals today that accepts the fact that they are going to develop 1 or several of these chronic degenerative diseases. They look to modern medicine as their savior and the medications as the cure. Sadly, only after they become ill do many individuals realize how ineffective many of the treatments actually are.

As the baby boomer generation enters their fifties, it is my personal and professional opinion that more and more individuals are going to become pro-active with their health. More and more people will look at preventative rather than post-problem treatment. ***Please be aware... traditional medicine's, preventative definition really is more one of early detection.*** Routine physicals, pap smears, mammograms, blood work and physical examinations primarily see if a silent disease already exists in a patient and they are wonderful at detecting early a disease while it is still silent. In reality, what has been prevented?

True preventative medicine/health care should prevent something. It involves encouraging and supporting patients to take a multi-faceted approach to their health: eating healthy, practicing a consistent exercise program, making sure their nervous system is functioning properly and consuming high-quality nutritional supplements. I believe that empowering patients to avoid getting these major diseases in the first place is true prevention.

Does it require "YOU" to be motivated? Absolutely! Most people are very willing to make the necessary lifestyle changes when they truly understand what is at stake. Statistics of the American population's health show that we as a culture have forgotten about how our body is one of the greatest defenses against becoming ill. It just makes common sense that it is much easier to maintain our health, than to try and regain it after it has been lost. Prevention of disease should be the first order of business! Yet, less than 1 % of our health care dollars are spent on so-called preventative medicine. As I mentioned earlier, in reality, the majority of our preventative medicine programs simply attempt to detect disease earlier.

I am confident that for much of what you have just read, people will say they have heard it before and it makes sense. So if it's common knowledge – what are we as individuals doing about it? Based on the statistics, we're doing very little. The good news is that you can become proactive about preserving the health that you have. Proper diet, appropriate exercise and nutritional therapy is common sense, mainstream, preventative healthcare that has the ability to reduce our need for post-illness medical care. It's never too late to get started! If you are already sick, please be encouraged. I have seen many patients with courage and determination improve their lives in countless ways. And, nutrition is one of the core level components for health improvement.

If nothing that I've indicated thus far motivates you to pursue improving your own personal health – what about this: Think of the cost. Health insurance costs keep going up; coverage overall goes down. All of us are paying more money out of our pockets for all aspects of health care. How many of us budget for our health care needs? The bottom line... you'll be saving money by maintaining and/or regaining your health because you won't be spending it on all those expensive tests, medications and hospital stays. Reducing your future health care costs is possible by improving your personal health today. When you improve your own personal health, you dramatically affect the health and attitude towards health of those around you as well!

Ultimately... it's your choice!

For more information pertaining to our "Healthy Life by Design" program, please visit us on the web: [www.naturalwellnesscentre.net](http://www.naturalwellnesscentre.net). This article is authored by Dr. James R. Grilliot, a chiropractic physician and director of Natural Wellness Centre; phone number: 740-687-0279.

