



Healthy aging easier in 21st century



Do you have someone in your family who is over 80 years of age? Whether it is a parent, grandparent or great aunt, most families have at least one relative that lives past the golden years. The reality is that people are living longer. According to the US Census Bureau there are 84,000 Americans 100 years or older. These 84,000 centenarians have seen a lot of changes throughout their lifetime especially in healthcare. The 100-plus population is estimated to

grow to 580,000 by 2040.

Before we examine the healthcare of today and the future, we must first take a step back and look at our past. Healthcare has really changed from the 1900s to the 2000s. The first EKG to read your heart was taken in 1903 and the electron microscope (used to magnify items 400 times) was introduced in 1933. The first successful transplant was a kidney in 1954 and the liver and heart followed 13 years later. The first “test tube baby” was born in the U.K. 1978. The Human Genome Project, a project designed to identify future diseases that you may have, started in the year of 2000. With the development of computers, medicine has gone high-tech.

What is Prevention?

Let’s take a closer look at the areas of disease prevention in the past, present and future. The roots of prevention reach back to the mid 1800s with the sanitary reform. During this time in England, the connection was made between the environment in which we live and with health and disease. Strict regulations were made on sewage removal and washing with soap was stressed. In the early 1900s the average life expectancy was 50 years and infectious diseases were the leading cause of death. Today we are living an average of 78 years. With people living longer, chronic diseases are now the leading causes of death among Americans. Our healthcare delivery system has shifted from treatment (1900s), to cure and prevention (2000) with a quality of life focus rather than basic needs. In the past a patient’s only option was to accept their diagnosis. Today we are looking at ways to prevent future problems before they even happen and using behavior change techniques at the first sign of complication.

Physicians and specialists were the only healthcare providers available 50 years ago. Today a team of skilled and non medical health care providers and ambassadors work together to form a first line of defense.

Prevention is used to reduce the risk of disease and illnesses. With the increase in our older adult population, preventable diseases have increased. This combination has increased healthcare costs as well. Prevention is the

solution. We can break prevention into three basic categories: primary, secondary, and tertiary.

Primary Prevention avoids the development of a disease. Most population-based health promotion activities are primary preventative measures.

Secondary Prevention activities are aimed at early disease detection, thereby increasing opportunities for interventions to prevent progression of the disease and emergence of symptoms.

Tertiary Prevention reduces the negative impact of an already established disease by restoring function and reducing disease-related complications.

In order for us to age successfully it is important to take advantage of the available healthcare and get involved with the community. Healthier diets, more active lifestyles, better medical diagnostic tools, and technology will all aid in the prevention of chronic disease. Individuals, families and the community can work together to spread the word of prevention.

Does a Person’s Age Define the Person?

In 2004 the Census Bureau reported 12 percent of the US population was 65 years of age or older (36.3 million).

This number is projected to reach 86.7 million by the year 2050, increasing to 21 percent of the population. With the redistribution of our population there is a need to update our view of aging. Age doesn’t necessarily define a person.

A person’s medical condition, financial status and social support can better describe the needs of a person. Terms such as the aged, elderly, older, elder and geriatric are out of date. We now refer to this population as “Adults over 50” for example or for that growing number of centenarians “Adults over 100”.

What Can We Expect In 2100?

What will life expectancy be by the year 2100? It could be 150 years or maybe even 200 years. Only time will tell.

Technology such as genetic therapy (treatment of a disease before you get it), cloning (creating an identical copy of cells or an individual), and cryonics (freezing your body in hopes that technology will be able to revive you again) will become a part of life.

On-line doctor visits, home testing, and treatment will replace going to the doctor’s office. The primary focus of healthcare will be quality & extension of life.

Many cures of diseases will be identified but new problems will arise. More people will be freezing their bodies at death in hopes of scientists finding a cure. Computerization will continue to be a part of our lives but more significantly, and prevention will always be “key”.

So what can we do today? We can practice the “10 Keys” to Healthy Aging

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