

“If you were the United States Surgeon General, what type of programs would you try to enact to educate the U.S. Population of the importance of preventive medicine?”

By Kristina N. Martin

If I were the United States Surgeon General, I would initiate a nationwide prevention plan. Studies have shown that by this year, the United States will be spending more than \$2.8 trillion on health care. Wouldn't it be better to fund programs that focus on the underlying factors that affect our nation's health? Chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease contribute to 70% of all deaths in the United States each year. Healthy lifestyle changes can be a huge factor in the prevention of these diseases. As the United States Surgeon General, I would institute a nationwide preventative plan to help citizens change their lifestyles for the better, improving their future.

I would begin with a plan to work cooperatively with employers, schools, and the health care sector to create a free health assessment and risk screening program. Health care specialists could identify a person's risk factors for chronic diseases by checking blood pressure, breathing, heart rhythm, weight, and cholesterol and glucose levels. Many individuals may not want to participate in such a program, but I believe if we set up some type of reward system, it may influence their decision. In 2009, the Federal Government offered a car allowance rebate system to individuals if they traded in their old, inefficient automobiles for more efficient ones. I would offer a similar program to individuals who complete this health assessment. The rebate would include health insurance premiums or co-pays, smoking cessation products, the purchase of healthy foods, exercise equipment including bicycles, ice skates, rollerblades, jogging strollers, gym memberships, or weight management plans. As negative as it is, human nature gravitates towards greed, making a reward system the most likely of plans to succeed.

A junk food eater may think differently while food shopping when given a voucher to buy items such as fresh fruits and vegetables. I am sure, given the state of today's economy, many people would welcome financial assistance in the purchase of healthy foods and would even change their eating habits because of it. A heavy smoker may have a better likelihood of quitting when offered the right tools and incentives. More people in the United States die of lung cancer than any other cancer. It would more cost effective for the U.S. to prevent this type of cancer than to treat it and to prevent obesity through healthy foods as well.

Once these individuals complete the free health assessment and risk screening program, they will be informed of their current health standing. They will have already received their incentives that will be helping improve their health in one way or another. Although they have taken their reward, I am positive that most of the individuals who were given a dangerous health assessment will pursue further medical assistance. It will help catch diseases, even cancer, early for many. Lastly, this will lead to revenue for our health care sector making it a preventative plan, as well as an overall health and wellness plan. The free health assessment may be completely funded through this aspect.

To prevent is to cure. To cure is to change an individual's life forever. As Surgeon General, I would be aware that the United States has the best health care in the world. However, to prevent individuals from experiencing health issues to begin with, it is necessary to institute a reward program that has been proven to get the job done. Through prevention, we can change an individual's life forever.