

A National Health Promotion Strategy

Earlier this year, Secretary Richard Schweiker took an important step reflecting the priority he assigns to disease prevention and health promotion by establishing an Executive Committee on Health Promotion to develop a comprehensive health promotion strategy for the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). In indication of his interest, the Secretary chairs the Committee with me as co-chairman. Other Executive Committee members include the heads of the major operating and staff divisions of the Department.

The primary emphasis of the DHHS health promotion strategy is to encourage behavioral and lifestyle changes that yield better health for Americans. While the initiative will embrace a broad range of efforts, the core concepts will be facilitating individual behavioral change to enhance the prospects for health. The component activities will include those that relate to lifestyle as well as those that pertain to the prevention of disease and disability through the appropriate use of preventive health services.

The choice of health promotion as the guiding theme for this important initiative highlights the changes that are occurring in our understanding of the importance of the various factors that influence health. This shift does not connote a di-

minution of traditional medical practice, but rather a recognition of our developing insight on the relationship between lifestyle and health status. Recent scientific advances and improvements in basic data systems have provided us with broader knowledge on the nature of certain diseases, as well as successful approaches for preventing them from occurring. People's daily decisions about smoking, diet, consumption of alcohol, and exercise can influence their own health destinies at least as much as the medical care that they may receive to treat their illnesses.

It is appropriate that the Department take advantage of this growth in knowledge and apply it to the development of a specific agenda to improve the health of the American people. The DHHS health promotion strategy is intended to mobilize the energies of individuals in all sectors and at all levels of society. The key element is the facilitation of behavior change through improved knowledge and understanding of the way in which each person can control his or her own health risks.

The Executive Committee is now in the process of developing the specific programs and activities that will frame this national health promotion effort. The programs and activities will focus on each age group and will include a range of behaviors which influence health status: dietary habits and eating patterns, physical exercise, smoking,

alcohol and drug abuse, and the appropriate use of preventive health services. The centerpiece of the initiative will consist of public and private information and educational programs offered through communities, the schools, the media, the worksite, and health care facilities.

As I have stated in previous editorials, the Department cannot successfully achieve the goals set forth for this or any other major initiative acting alone. This must be a truly national effort. Change may not be immediate, and it will only occur with the support and full participation of every sector of society. The measures now being taken to strengthen the DHHS focus on health promotion should provide an important boost to the effort.

This initiative will demand the best efforts from all health professionals. It is a splendid opportunity for everyone committed to health promotion. Now is the time to get involved. Your participation is essential. If not you, then who?

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