

NATIONAL DISCUSSION AND DEBATE SERIES: HEALTH CARE

Lesson One: An Ounce of Prevention is Worth A Pound of Cure

Overview: The current health care reform debate focuses on ways to extend coverage to the uninsured and cap soaring health care costs. Rising rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes and skyrocketing costs of accompanying treatments suggest that meaningful reform also requires a thoughtful examination of the factors that contribute to health and disease so that healthy behaviors can be promoted and chronic disease reduced and prevented. This lesson helps students assess the current state of American health and brainstorm strategies for promoting healthy behaviors.

Time: 45-55 minutes

Objectives:

1. Understand how chronic disease impacts health care costs
2. Examine the behaviors that cause or prevent chronic diseases
3. Discuss strategies that will promote health and prevent disease
4. Analyze the connection between prevention and health care reform

Materials:

- [An Unhealthy America Research Findings](#) (p.14-15)
http://www.milkeninstitute.org/pdf/chronic_disease_report.pdf
- A stack of old magazines
- Butcher paper
- Board or overhead projector

Procedure:

1. Post the following quote and statistics on the board or overhead. Ask a volunteer to read the quote to the class.

“Reducing the avoidable costs associated with [chronic] conditions [diabetes, cancer, hypertension, stroke, pulmonary conditions, mental disorders, and heart disease] is central to meeting the twin challenges of promoting affordable health care and fostering continued economic growth. We have a choice: continue on the current path or alter it by changing our behaviors and focusing on prevention and early intervention.”

- *162 million cases of chronic diseases in America, which costs the economy \$1.3 trillion annually (\$277 billion in treatment and \$1.1 trillion in lost productivity)*
- *Assuming modest improvements in preventing and treating disease, we could avoid 40 million cases of chronic disease annually and reduce the economic impact of disease by 27% by 2023*
- *Lower obesity rates alone could produce productivity gains of \$254 billion and avoid \$60 billion in treatment expenditures per year*

(Source: Devol, Ross and Armen Bedroussian. The Milken Institute. “An Unhealthy America: The Economic Burden of Chronic Disease - Charting a New Course to Save Lives and Increase Productivity and Economic Growth.” October 2007. http://www.milkeninstitute.org/pdf/chronic_disease_report.pdf)

2. Ask students the following questions:
 - What do you think is causing the rates of chronic diseases such as diabetes to rise in the United States?
 - According to the statistics listed here, what is the economic impact of lowering obesity rates and making modest improvements in chronic disease prevention?
 - What do you think will prevent the growth of chronic disease rates?
 - How do you think the growing rates of chronic diseases are affecting the current health care system?
3. The above quote asserts that we can “continue on the current path or alter it by changing our behaviors and focusing on prevention and early intervention.” How do we promote healthy behaviors and prevent the behaviors that lead to chronic diseases? Instruct students to divide a piece of paper into two columns. Label one column “Healthy Behaviors.” Label the second column “Unhealthy Behaviors.” Give students 2-3 minutes to brainstorm behaviors for each column.
4. Divide students into small groups. In groups, students will share their lists. Distribute old magazines and a piece of butcher paper to each group. Again, students will divide the butcher paper into two columns. Instruct students to find images in the magazine that promote or represent the behaviors they listed. On the left side of the paper, students will make a photo collage of healthy behaviors. On the right side, students will make a photo collage of unhealthy behaviors. Ask students to write down insights or questions they have while making the collage.
5. When all groups have finished, ask each group to share its list and photo collage. Make two columns on the board and ask a student volunteer to record healthy and unhealthy behaviors as each group shares.

6. View the list of healthy and unhealthy behaviors as a class. Use the following questions to promote class discussion:
- What insights or questions did you have while completing this activity?
 - How are the behaviors listed in the healthy column promoted or suppressed by American society, media, the government, your community, or your school? How are the behaviors listed in the unhealthy column promoted or suppressed?
 - List factors that cause people to engage in unhealthy behaviors. What factors encourage people to engage in healthy behaviors?
 - What changes could the federal, state or local government make to promote health and prevent disease? How could other groups or individuals promote health and prevent disease? (*Example: Increase farm to school alliances so that fresh food is available to students, promote safe walking trails, increase the amount of bike lanes available, etc.*)
 - How might these changes impact health care spending and reform?