

February 2011: Heart Health

Be Active, Eat Smart, Don't Smoke, Get Checked! *Prevention Matters!*

In the coming decades, the population of Los Angeles County is projected to age at an exponential rate. In 2010, over 600,000 women in the county were estimated to be over the age of 65, and that number is expected to double by 2030. (1) **Cardiovascular Disease, the leading cause of death among women**, is the most significant condition affecting the women of Los Angeles County.

Racial Health Disparities and Heart Disease

Across the county, about 8% of adult women have reported ever being diagnosed with heart disease. However, 40% of adult women are at risk for heart disease, defined as having two or more of the following risk factors: cigarette smoking, physical inactivity, obesity, diabetes, hypertension, high cholesterol. (2)

When examining mortality data, it is clear that heart disease affects black women at disproportionately higher rates than other groups of women. For instance, black women have the highest coronary heart disease death rate (200/100,000) and stroke death rate (59/100,000) when compared to rates overall for women in the county (135/100,000 and 40/100,000 respectively). Also, over half (53%) of black women are at risk for developing heart disease. (2)

Income Disparities and Heart Disease

There is also a strong correlation between income and the prevalence of heart disease among women; women with lower incomes have much higher rates of heart disease and higher risks of developing heart disease. For instance, among women living at or above 300% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), the prevalence of heart disease is 5% and the risk for developing heart disease is 31%, compared with women living at or below 100% of the FPL with a 10% prevalence of heart disease and a 49% risk for developing heart disease. (2)

Therefore, it is especially important to design programs and policies geared towards eliminating these disparities.

Primordial Prevention

Primordial prevention is a concept that is receiving special attention in the prevention of chronic diseases. Many adult health problems such as heart disease, obesity, and hypertension have their early origins in childhood because this is the time when lifestyles are formed. Primordial prevention is a society-level mechanism to prevent the risk factors themselves, beginning with a change in the social and environmental conditions in which these factors developed. For example, there is strong evidence that regulating the amount of sodium in foods (or at least providing food labels disclosing the amount of sodium in a product) has

lowered the incidence of CVD-related illnesses. Unlike primary prevention, which aims to prevent the first occurrence of a clinical event among high risk individuals, and secondary prevention, which aims to prevent a secondary event among individuals who already have the clinical disease, primordial prevention seeks to reduce risk factors on a population level. (3)

First introduced in 1978, primordial prevention can be likened to community vaccination campaigns, which preemptively protect communities from infectious diseases by decreasing the risk that anyone will contract the disease. (4) Primordial prevention is especially relevant in light of research suggesting that if someone develops harmful risk factors for cardiovascular disease (CVD), serious outcomes such as stroke and heart attacks are very difficult to prevent later in the lifespan. (3) Thus, by designing large-scale policy, lifestyle, and community interventions, we can achieve important shifts in the entire distribution of CVD risk factors and reduce incidence of CVD in the long-term.

Examples of the Department of Public Health's use of Primordial Prevention in LA County

- Menu Labeling as a Potential Strategy for Combating the Obesity Epidemic
http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/docs/Menu_Labeling_Report_2008.pdf
- The Potential Health Impact of Reducing Excess Sodium Consumption in Los Angeles County
<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/docs/SodiumConsumptionBrief2010.pdf>
- Project RENEW (Renew Environments for Nutrition, Exercise, and Wellness)
<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/docs/FactSheetProjectRENEW.pdf>
- Project TRUST (Tobacco Reduction Using Effective Strategies & Teamwork)
<http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/docs/FactSheetProjectTRUST.pdf>

Prevention Matters!

References:

1. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. Healthy Aging: A Guide to Important Health Topics Among Older Women in Los Angeles County, 2010.
2. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Office of Women's Health. Health Indicators for Women in Los Angeles County: Highlighting Disparities by Ethnicity and Poverty Level, February 2010.
3. American Heart Association (2010). Defining and setting national goals for cardiovascular health promotion and disease reduction: The American Heart Association's strategic impact goal through 2020 and beyond. *Circulation* (121)pp. 586-613.
4. Strasser, T. (1978). Reflections on cardiovascular diseases. *Interdisciplinary Science Reviews* 3(3)pp. 225-230.