



Health-care changes will be inevitable

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Our current model of health care will need to change to meet the demands of 45 million Americans who can no longer afford its care.

Last year, \$2.1 trillion was spent in the United States on medical care, or 16.5 percent of the gross national product; 95 cents of every dollar was spent to treat disease after it had already occurred.

The current system, while adept at addressing acute illness, falls short in addressing chronic conditions, which consume more than 75 percent of health-care costs and are largely affected by lifestyle choices and health behaviors (\$1.87 trillion).

Approximately 40 percent of Americans now use complementary medicine as part of their overall health care; 10 million adults engage in some form of regular meditation, double the number a decade ago; 15 million practice yoga, twice the number in 1999.

The merits of acupuncture in treating pain and arthritis are well documented in peer-reviewed medical journals.

A recent "Summit on Integrative Medicine and the Health of the Public," sponsored by the

Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, addressed a holistic approach to health care that uses the best of conventional and alternative therapies (such as meditation, yoga and acupuncture), which are scientifically documented to be medically effective, as well as cost effective.

As the medical profession redefines itself in more narrow scientific and technological spheres, other disciplines will evolve. Wellness, prevention, and illness will be addressed by non-physician clinicians, as the role of nurses broaden their scope of practice to provide comprehensive care within a model that cares for the whole patient.

We must avoid health care that is too often fragmented and reactive, with little patient-engagement. We must redirect our focus from a purely "disease-care system" paradigm which practices "find it and fix it" to one that will promote and enhance well-being.

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