



Chronic Disease Burden

According to the Office of the Surgeon General, 7 of 10 Americans who die each year, expire from a preventable chronic disease such as heart disease, diabetes and many forms of cancer. Health care spending in the United States reached \$2.3 trillion last year, which is 16% of the country's gross domestic product, more than 1.5-3 times most other industrialized nations. Yet, the United States lags behind many countries in life expectancy (23rd) and in childhood mortality (43rd). For example, in 2009 the average life expectancy in the US is 79.4 years, which is lower than Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, England, France, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Canada and Australia despite spending significantly more on health.

How can we account for this disparity? The United States leads the world in technological and bioscience innovation. We have the best doctors, the best surgeons, the best scientific research, and many leading pharmaceutical and medical device developers. Yet, why do we fall near the bottom of other industrialized countries in health outcomes? With increasing globalization, our relatively poor health outcomes cannot be explained by genetic factors, relative stress levels or diet alone. We cannot explain this difference by the number of doctors per 1,000 persons, since the United States has more than double the number of doctors than any other industrialized nation.

To address the drivers of costs, namely chronic diseases and ineffective, expensive therapies, the Office of the Surgeon General has declared that disease prevention is its number one priority. The Department of Health and Human Services also recently created the **Personalized Health Care Initiative** (www.hhs.gov/myhealthcare) to improve the safety, quality, and

effectiveness of healthcare for every patient, so that therapies can become more targeted.

Furthermore, academic institutions are joining the movement to address the need to improve healthcare in this country. For example, the Center for Spirituality and Healing and the Life Science Foundation at the University of Minnesota have joined together and established a Web portal called **Taking Charge of Your Health** (www.takingcharge.csh.umn.edu). This Web site provides information for the general public to navigate through the current healthcare system. The information they provide is grounded in rigorous, academic research and approaches the issues from both a traditional and integrative medical perspective, focusing on nutrition, mindfulness and other lifestyle practices.