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## Preventative Care Key to Slowing Health Costs

*by Dr. James Proodian*

The effort put into the landmark legislation on the delivery of health care has been about everything but health care. The focus has been on manipulating the process rather than fixing the problem of rising health care costs and making Americans healthier. The answer is preventative care which has proven to reduce costs and improve wellness with disease prevention. Today, the United States ranks 27<sup>th</sup> in the world in health and is characterized by epidemics in obesity, depression, and type 2 diabetes.

The bottom line is that 78% of all doctor visits are for chronic conditions such as heart disease, obesity, type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and other lifestyle-caused illnesses. These are highly preventable, but there is no layer in our health care system that is defined, credentialed and committed to treating chronic illness. Creating this new layer of health care is what legislators should be discussing.

With all the focus on the cost of healthcare reform, no one is talking about the cost of chronic illness which accounts for 78% of all health care expenditures. This means that three out of four patients are visiting their doctor because of chronic illness. Behavioral and lifestyle health change is the leading way to impact health care costs — and more importantly improve the health and wellness of individuals of all ages.

While there are health care professionals who are dedicated to chronic disease prevention and wellness, it is an individual's responsibility to find them in their community. Real health care reform would be establishing a new layer in our health care system that is defined, credentialed and committed to treating chronic illness. ■



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