

Health chief tackles future

By Alice Collins
staff writer

Stanley Nelson describing a common American lifestyle.

"We drive to the drugstore to buy cigarettes, drive to the liquor store for booze, drive to the fast-food place and pick up a bucket of grease and then go home, lie down in front of the tube to have a pleasant evening."

It's not only unhealthy, according to Nelson, it's also responsible for a major chunk of medical expenditures in this country.

Who is Stanley Nelson and why is he so concerned about what he calls the sedentary American lifestyle?

Nelson, who lives in Bloomfield Hills and is executive vice president of Henry Ford Hospital, just assumed the national chairmanship of the American Hospital Association (AHA).

It's his job to worry on a national level about the costs of medical care, threatened cuts in federal health spending and the direction of American health care future.

The American lifestyle, which includes substance abuse, is a primary concern and prevention, modification and treatment are high on the list of medical priorities.

"ALCOHOLISM alone," said Nelson, "is the third most prevalent disease in our society today."

Nelson talked about the problems facing the health care industry last week during an interview at his office in Henry Ford Hospital in Detroit.

He had just returned from Washington, D.C., where he was sworn in as the highest-ranking officer of the AHA, an organization of more than 6,100 member health care institutions.

In his acceptance address, he called for the preservation of "those preventive health measures and early treatment programs which are so vulnerable during a budget crisis."

"Abandonment (of the programs) could result in future costs to society many times current costs."

"WE DON'T know yet what the federal cuts are going to be," said Nelson during the interview, "but the Medicare and Medicaid programs are the big ones."

Cuts in these programs "may move us into a two-tier system — those who can afford it (medical treatment) and those who can't."

"I think it's the responsibility of the hospitals to speak out in behalf of the people who can't speak for themselves, the elderly and the poor."

As leader of the AHA, Nelson will be speaking out loudly so that Congress can hear.

"Will hospitals have to close down programs? Will people have to go without care? Preventive maintenance is so important," he said.

WHILE FIGHTING to retain federal money for necessary programs, said Nelson, the AHA should do all in its power to contain costs.

"There's a great deal of uncertainty as to what's going to happen at the federal level. But clearly, health care cost containment is a very high priority at this time."

The current trend in health care is on prevention through education, accomplished by hospital-sponsored community outreach programs. "People are learning to become more responsible for their own health care."

The movement is toward out-patient treatment centers as opposed to hospitalization. It's toward home treatment whenever possible.

Advancements in medical technology and knowledge have made treatment shorter and hospital stays briefer.

WILLIAM BEAUMONT Hospital's proposed cardiac rehabilitation and community fitness center to be located in the former Barnum school in Birmingham is an example of the new out-patient specialized medical facilities.

Henry Ford Hospital's West Bloomfield campus is an example of the new out-patient specialized medical facilities.

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JOHN STANO/staff photographer

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