

When modern medicine as we know it was developed, the primary challenges were acute problems. In 1900, the top three causes of death were all acute infectious diseases: typhoid, tuberculosis and pneumonia. Other common reasons for medical visits included broken limbs, gallbladder attacks, appendicitis and similar problems.

The treatment for those problems was relatively straightforward. You put the arm in a cast or remove the gallbladder. It was one doctor, one problem, one treatment and that was the end of the story.

Today, 7 of the 10 top causes of death are chronic diseases rather than acute and, unlike acute problems, chronic diseases tend to be complex, difficult to manage, and often last a lifetime. In short, the model of care that was developed for treating acute problems doesn't work for chronic disease.

Half of all Americans now have at least one chronic disease. What is even more disturbing is that almost 30 percent of our children struggle with a chronic disease, almost double what it was in 1994. That fact by itself should answer any doubts you may have about whether or not we need a major change in our health care strategy. Acute care medicine doesn't work well for chronic problems. We're simply using the wrong tools for the job.

The health care debate, which is focused on the availability of insurance, is completely missing the point. If we don't get a handle on chronic disease, there's no method of paying for

health care that will be sufficient. A simple thought experiment should show this. It costs \$14,000 a year to treat the average patient with Type 2 diabetes. The most recent statistics by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention suggests that 100 million Americans now either have prediabetes or full-fledged Type 2 diabetes. You don't have to be a math genius to multiply 100 million times \$14,000. You get a number so big that it's absolutely impossible to generate the money we would need to cover just that one chronic condition. **By the way that number is 1.4 trillion**

Our health care system must be based on Prevention Programs and take every opportunity to work with people to prevent the preventable and manage the manageable. This means helping us all improve our understanding of the underlying causes of disease and helping us to take control of our own health.

If we recognize that diet and lifestyle are the primary drivers of chronic disease ... then we need to acknowledge that educating and supporting our community is the most important step we can take to prevent and reverse our health problems. Unfortunately, our medical system just pays the briefest lip service to that approach. It's not set up to actually deliver that kind of care.