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Preventive measures could drastically improve employee health

By Chris Silva

More than 100,000 additional American lives could be saved each year if people better followed basic preventive care, according to a [recent study](#) from the Partnership for Prevention. Employers may wish to enhance their programs and communications promoting prevention.

The study found troubling deficiencies in the use of preventive care across the nation and among minorities in particular.

Key findings include:

- 45,000 additional lives would be saved each year if we increased to 90% the portion of adults who take aspirin daily to prevent heart disease. Today, fewer than half of adults take aspirin preventively.
- 42,000 additional lives would be saved if we increased to 90% the portion of smokers who are advised by a health professional to quit and are offered medication or other assistance. Today, only 28% of smokers receive such services.
- 14,000 additional lives would be saved if we increased to 90% the portion of adults age 50 and older who are up-to-date with recommended screenings for colorectal cancer. Today, fewer than 50% of adults are up-to-date.
- 12,000 additional lives would be saved if we increased to 90% the portion of adults age 50 and older who get an annual flu shot. Right now, only 37% get a shot.
- Nearly 4,000 additional lives would be saved if we increased to 90% the portion of women age 40 and older who have been screened for breast cancer within the past two years. Currently, 67% have been screened.

With preventive measures, Julie Gerberding, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, explains, “more illnesses would be avoided, fewer lives would be lost, and there would be more efficient use of our limited health care resources. It’s important that all of us make a concerted attempt to focus our energies and efforts on preventing disease, not just treating it.”

Hispanic Americans have lower utilization for 10 of the 11 preventive services analyzed, compared to non-Hispanic whites and African Americans. Hispanic smokers, for example, are 55% less likely to receive assistance in quitting smoking from a health professional than white smokers. Asian Americans have the lowest utilization of any group for aspirin use, as well as breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screening.

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