

An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure
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Nearly 300 years ago, Benjamin Franklin said, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”¹ Although he was referring to house fire prevention, this saying is certainly applicable to disease prevention.

The cost of preventing disease is generally far less than the cost of treating disease. According to a January 2020 Commonwealth Fund report, the U.S. spends more per person on healthcare than on any other part of the economy and spends more than any other developed country, including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.² In 2020, U.S. health care spending rose to \$4.1 trillion.³ A large part of this spending is on preventable conditions, emergency room visits, and hospitalizations. The Commonwealth Fund states that the U.S. has the highest chronic disease burden, obesity, and avoidable death rate, lowest life expectancy and rate of physician visits, and “has among the highest number of hospitalizations from preventable causes” compared to our peer nations.⁴

While these objective health measures are staggering, the human suffering that often accompanies preventable conditions is immeasurable.

For years I practiced as a registered nurse in the hospital and cared for patients who experienced heart attacks, strokes and other preventable conditions. It saddened me knowing that many of these hospitalizations could have been prevented. Healthy lifestyles, including diets full of vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, regular physical activity, avoiding smoking, and limiting alcohol, is often the best way to prevent disease. Stress management, sleep, healthy recreation, and positive social connections are also important aspects of balanced, holistic health.

Another important preventive step is health monitoring through regular primary care check-ups. Primary care providers can monitor simple health measures such as weight, body mass index, blood pressure (BP), and other tests to check for early signs of disease. Conditions like high BP (hypertension) and diabetes mellitus, particularly when combined with smoking, excess alcohol, and being overweight, can lead to stroke, heart and kidney diseases, and vision loss. Heart disease can lead to heart attacks and heart failure, strokes can lead to permanent brain damage and loss of the normal ability to walk, move, speak and/or swallow, and kidney disease can lead

¹ <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-02-02-0002>

² https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Tikkanen_US_hlt_care_global_perspective_2019_OECD_db_v2.pdf

³ <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/highlights.pdf>

⁴ https://www.commonwealthfund.org/sites/default/files/2020-01/Tikkanen_US_hlt_care_global_perspective_2019_OECD_db_v2.pdf

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to the need for hours of dialysis on multiple days of the week, and all of these conditions can lead to hospitalization and early death.

Since 2014 the University of Hawai'i at Hilo School of Nursing (SON)⁵ has collaborated with Community First and Big Island schools on an annual Know Your Numbers Educators project⁶. Senior UH Hilo nursing students provide 6th graders with education about the importance of BP monitoring, factors that can lead to hypertension and the health consequences of hypertension such as stroke, heart and kidney disease. They are also taught how to correctly measure an adult BP. The students then take BP cuffs home to measure adult family members' BPs and provide BP education. From 2014 to 2021, 831 6th graders have participated in the Know Your Numbers Educators project and have taken over 4,480 BP measurements.

By educating youth who share the information learned with their families, the UH Hilo SON and Community First hope to raise awareness about the dangers of hypertension, the importance of BP monitoring, and help community members prevent or identify hypertension earlier.

Community First is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit founded by the late Barry Taniguchi in 2014 to serve as a neutral forum for the community to come together, and as a catalyst for solutions to improve health and access to health care.

⁵ <https://hilo.hawaii.edu/depts/nursing/bsn/>

⁶ <https://www.communityfirsthawaii.org/know-your-numbers-2-2/>