

One in a Million

Ariel Lefland

One in three deaths in the United States is due to heart disease. Each day, 2,200 Americans die from heart disease; 800,000 die each year. Of these deaths, 150,000 occur in individuals under 65 years old. It kills about the same number of Americans each year as cancer, lower respiratory disease (including pneumonia) and accidents combined. One in three adults, or eighty million people, are affected by heart disease; two million heart attacks and strokes occur in the United States per year. The risk factors for heart disease and strokes including hypertension, high cholesterol, smoking and obesity are in most individuals preventable and controllable, yet more than 100 million people, half of American adults, smoke, have uncontrolled hypertension or cholesterol, or are prone to a combination of multiple risk factors. Although African Americans, elderly individuals and women are at higher risks than others for heart disease, people of all ages, genders, races and ethnicities are affected; we are all at risk, and too many of us have been affected, either directly or indirectly, already. It is time to take the next big step in the fight against cardiovascular disease to limit the number of people with these risk factors and prevent the onset of the disease in those who already have them. The Million Hearts initiative aims to do just that.

Million Hearts is a national initiative with a goal of preventing one million heart attacks and strokes over the next five years. By bringing together communities, health systems, nonprofit organizations and partners from the private-sector across the country, the program is putting into place a number of different campaigns and programs to fight heart disease. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the National Institutes of Health, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the Food and Drug Administration, the American Heart Association (AHA) and YMCA are among the program's many partners. The AHA will help monitor Million Hearts' progress and provide patients and consumers with heart health management tools such as risk calculators.¹ Walgreens, another private sector partner, will provide blood pressure testing at no charge. The American Pharmacists' Association and the American

Pharmacists' Association Foundation will encourage its members, which total over 62,000, to become part of the campaign and raise awareness with their patients and communities. Participation by both public and private groups is expected to grow in the next several months. Million Hearts aims to improve access to effective care, improve quality of care, focus more clinical attention on heart attack and stroke

prevention, increase public awareness of how to lead a heart-healthy lifestyle, and increase consistent use of high blood pressure and cholesterol medications.¹ The program was launched in September 2011 by the Department of Health and Human Services and will last five years; however, if it is successful, its impact will be profound and will last far longer than that.

Implementing effective and cost-effective interventions can help limit the number of people

who suffer from the disease each year. Current statistics show that less than half of people with ischemic heart disease take baby aspirins daily or another blood thinning agent. Statistics further show that less than fifty percent of individuals with hypertension have adequately controlled the condition and that only a third of people with hyperlipidemia have adequate treatment. Finally, less than a quarter of smokers who try to quit the habit get counseling or medication. The initiative will increase control and standardization of the "ABCS," or aspirin administration, blood pressure and cholesterol control and smoking cessation, by reducing or eliminating copayments for medications, implementing once-a-day dosing, utilizing team-based care approaches and stepwise care management, and increasing standardization of care.¹ Standardizing ABCS will allow medical practices to disseminate the best practices and improve the quality of care.

The first part of the program is aimed primarily at healthcare providers. Dr. Donald Berwick, chief of Medicare and Medicaid, and Dr. Frieden, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, noted that getting doctors to push their patients to quit smoking doubles the likelihood

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that a smoker will successfully abandon the addiction. Doctors can also help smokers' attempts to quit by prescribing one of seven approved smoking cessation drugs.³ Additionally, the program wants doctors to increase the number of patients who use aspirin. The first step in standardizing care has already begun with the transition to electronic medical records in many offices and practices across the nation. The program may even ultimately be connected to approaches in which providers are paid more for better preventative care measures. Physician Quality Reporting System provides bonus payments and in the future will provide payment reductions based on reporting of quality information by professionals. The second part of the program is aimed at creating an overall heart healthy society. Million Hearts is working with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to limit the amount of salts in foods. The problem, officials note, is not the saltshaker on our tables. Instead it is the amount of salt in our food before it gets to our plates. Reducing sodium intake is a key step in reducing the risk for hypertension and, thus, cardiovascular disease. Processed store bought foods and restaurant dishes are being targeted most. Menu-labeling will be required in chain restaurants to allow people to make informed choices about their food consumption and nutrition. Additionally, the program will work to educate the public on the importance of reducing sodium intake. Artificial trans fats are also a significant factor in raising low-density lipoprotein (LDL) cholesterol levels and lowering high-density lipoprotein (HDL) cholesterol levels. The FDA has begun to require listing of trans fat content on food labels. There has already been a reduction in trans fat consumption. This community-based prevention will work alongside First Lady Michelle Obama's "Let's Move" initiative to decrease childhood obesity. Obesity and physical activity are undeniably linked to the prevalence of heart disease. Her program along with Million Hearts will advocate increased physical activity and better nutrition and habits in children and adults alike.²

The program is empowering Americans to make healthy choices.³ By the numbers, artificial trans fat consumption will hopefully be reduced by fifty percent by 2017 and sodium intake on average must see a 20 percent reduction. Federal officials want to expand the number of Americans with their blood cholesterol under control by 20 million people. Aspirin use for people at high risk and blood pressure control must both go from under fifty-percent to sixty-five percent in 2017. The program goals also include four million smokers quitting by 2016.

The statistics are sobering, yet Million Hearts has the ability to prevent the many deaths that cardiovascular disease causes. Decreasing the consumption of trans fats will save

50,000 deaths per year, and controlling cholesterol and blood pressure could save more than 100,000 people a year. Ten million more Americans will have their hypertension controlled. Twenty million will have their high cholesterol under control. In the words of those who suffer from cardiovascular disease, the initiative is "going to my daughter's graduation," "playing with my dogs," "spending time with my grandkids;" the initiative is allowing people to beat heart disease by creating a healthier environment for children to grow up in, enforcing better preventative care measures and ensuring quality care improvement. The initiative will hopefully be a successful stepping-stone in cardiac care.

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