

## THOUGHT YOU'D LIKE TO KNOW

...that I was considering focusing on the disease of the month, breast cancer, as the main topic for this month's column but an email from one of my graduated students quickly changed my mind! Every week she sends me the news briefs from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's (RWJF) with all the latest hot topics in public health.

I still do want to say something about breast cancer and the impact that it still has upon the lives of so many—both men and women--although more of the attention is directed towards women. What is so disturbing is that breast cancer receives the most attention and funding of all cancers but lung cancer has more victims than all other cancers combined and continues to lurk in the shadows unnoticed and with underfunded research and prevention.

This brings me to share what caught my attention in that email message. If you can remember back to last fall when my doctoral course then was Health Care Quality, I told you about the six aims established a decade ago that would measure the quality of care you receive from our health care system. Those aims were addressed to assure that the system was *safe, efficient, effective, timely, patient-centered and equitable*.

May I tell you that we have failed miserably in achieving any of those aims! Ten years later and we still have nearly 100,000 deaths each year attributed to medical errors. Going down that list of aims, timeliness may have improved somewhat; patient-centeredness is showing some hope with the push for "medical homes" (but that was a thought 20 years ago) and the health care is far from equitable as we still have massive health disparities based on race, gender, ethnicity and often-times-location.

Public health aims include the same 3 -E words but since whole communities are our patients or clients, it is *population-centered* and must be *proactive, health-promoting, risk-reducing, vigilant and transparent* as well. That is why I write this column each month. In my own little corner of the world, my words have hopefully helped do that for Merrimac's efforts

to keep its residents as risk-free, healthy and knowledgeable as possible.

This new RWJF initiative underway in conjunction with the US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS) along with numerous other national organizations is called *Care About Your Care*. I do believe this has been the underlying message I have been bringing each month when I urge you to be a partner in your own health care and well-being. It is up to each individual to be sure they are receiving quality care when seeking health care from your provider.

Health care, be it either acute care or public health, must base their practice on evidence-based and proven quality outcomes. "We've always done it this way" doesn't work anymore. I'm sure many of you have experienced my lecture on the "evidenced-based practice" for the simple thing of taking a blood pressure!

But that's only the beginning of how you personally need to be an active participant in your own care. Speak up, ask questions, take someone who can if you can't when keeping your appointments with your health care provider! Does your provider use electronic medical records now—ask to see yours—you can, you know!

In closing, remember the life you save will be your own! *Care About Your Care!!*

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